A Cinematic Battle: Three Yugoslav War Films from the 1960s

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Abstract

The content of my thesis will present the analysis of three Yugoslav war films from the 1960s that they offer different views on World War II as a moment of creation of the state that aimed towards supranationalism and classlessness. I will analyse the films in terms of their production, iconography and reception as to show that although the Yugoslav government, led by a great cinephile Josip Broz Tito, demonstrated interest in the war film genre, there were opposing filmmakers' views on what WWII should represent in the Yugoslav history and collective mythology. By using the concept of historiophoty I will demonstrate that the war films represented the failure of Yugoslav government in integrating different nations into a supranational Yugoslav society in which conflicts between different social agents (the state, workers and peasants) will finally be resolved.

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This thesis is dedicated to my brother, Jovan.

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List of Abbreviations

AGITPROP - Odeljenje za agitaciju i propagandu (Department for agitation and propaganda)

FPRY (FNRJ) – Federative People's Republic of Yugoslavia (Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija)

LCY (SKJ) – League of Communists of Yugoslavia (Savez komunista Jugoslavije)

OZNA – Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda (The Department of National Security)

UFUS – Udruženje filmskih umetnika Srbije (Association of Film Artists of Serbia)

YPA (JNA) – Yugoslav People's Army (Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija)

YCLY (SKOJ) – Young Communist League of Yugoslavia (Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije)

Introduction

When all episodes of the partisan TV series *Otpisani*, based on the plot of the 1974 partisan film of the same title by Aleksandar Djordjević, were broadcast on Serbian television a few years ago, Natalija Bašić at the Hamburg Institute of Social Research was inspired to review Yugoslavia's memory of the partisan past. Evidently this past was in many ways returning to the present – including some digitally re-mastered versions of former Yugoslavia's partisan films. From three-generation-interviews Bašić found out that that the historical memory of most Yugoslavians was not dominated by information generated in schoolbooks but rather determined by the knowledge of partisan films.[1]

The above quote highlights that three generations of Yugoslavs have been watching the history of their country from the perspective of a fiction film, and not from academic books which are the usual source of historical information. It is interesting that World War II was not mentioned even once as a concrete historical event which inspired the emergence of the Yugoslav war/partisan film. Instead of "war", the keyword is "partisan;" used as a synonym for the victor that can write the history. Naturally, the victorious history is unimaginable without the grandiose moment of liberation and Yugoslav communists coming into power. Carried by the wave of their glorious fight, they believed in building a better and fairer society. After the end of WWII, the Yugoslav War of Liberation "was the central founding myth upon which the new Tito-led postwar government was built."[2] Antic Greek playwrights wrote tragedies with mythological background to show, in an indirect way, the political scene of their time; Hollywood director turned Westerns into metaphors about modern conservatism and liberalism; in like manner, Yugoslav film directors made films

[1] Natalija Bašić, "Der Zweite Weltkrieg im Fernsehen. Filmpartisanen im kroatischen und serbischen Familiengedachtnis," *Ethnologia balkanica,* vol. 8(2004): 57-77, quoted in Miranda Jakiša, "Down to Earth Partisans: Fashioning of YU-Space in Partisan Film," *KINO!* 10 (2010): 54.

[2] Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945-2001* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 11.

about WWII, or films about the past in order to outline the problems of the period in which those films were made.

In this thesis I will analyze three Yugoslav war films from the 1960s as I believe that they offer different views on World War II as a moment of creation of the state that aimed towards supranationalism and classlessness. Their cinematic heterogeneousness differs from the monolithic discourse of official history which was interested only in glorification of the partisan movement and revolutionary changes; mistakes and crimes of the new government could not have been criticized in historical literature, contrary to films in which history was not the final truth, but merely a subject of interpretation. In written history the roles of "good" guys and "bad" guys were casted in advance, while film narratives were much more ambivalent, sometimes independently even from the original intentions of their authors.

I have chosen the 1960s as the temporal focus for several reasons: first, this was the period when Yugoslav socialism was at its peak of domestic and international political power, leaving behind the break up with the USSR and forming closer relationships with Western democracies. Thanks to financial support from the West and pivotal position in the Non-Aligned movement, Yugoslavia witnessed a short but golden age of prosperity which justified the economic doctrine of self-management. It seemed that finally there was a state formed in which working class alone manages the fruits of their work, without the "help" of bureaucracy or hard dictatorship; fiercely opposed nationalisms from the World War II and previous epochs seemed harmonized and directed towards generation of a common, Yugoslav identity. Secondly, this decade saw the liberalization of Yugoslav intellectual circles when critically oriented Praxis Marxists, avant-garde painter's group Mediala or younger filmmakers who openly showed social problems, appeared on the scene. Tito's regime felt safe in its position, hence it could allow greater freedom in cultural matters in order to maintain its image of the most democratic country in the Eastern Europe. Thirdly, the social verve mapped itself on Yugoslav cinematography which matured in technical and esthetic aspect. In film journals dynamic theoretical debates are led, commercial and art film compete, directors get awards on prestigious foreign film festivals which contributes the

establishment of Yugoslav film in international frame. However, the golden age of Yugoslav society did not last for long: economy showed the lack of clear strategy, from the middle of 1960s nationalism started to wake up, while the voices demanding reorganization of the state became louder and louder. Seeing as how the political elite led by Tito was not willing to conduct those reforms, the political showdown with intellectual opponents became inevitable and this turn took Yugoslavia into stagnation during 1970s. The spirit and the dilemmas of the 1960s were recorded by the war film genre as if it were a social seismograph and that is why it represents valuable historical account.

In my theoretical chapter I will set up a framework in which I will analyze films from the three main aspects: production, iconography and reception. The first aspect deals with the organization of film production in Yugoslavia which was significantly affected by the state's decision that filmmakers can form smaller production companies and compete in making profitable films. By iconography, I mean the modus of representation of protagonists and antagonists of partisan films focused on labeling their nationality. In a broader context, I will also address directors' styles; that is to say, the way in which film represented opposing versions of war. By reception I mean film critiques in journals, magazines, and newspapers as the most important medias for assessing films, as well as reactions of the audience. The main theoretical premise in this analysis will be Hayden White's notion of *historiophoty* which is based on the assumption that film covers the field of studies which is very much different than traditional historiography. The discussion about this term blurs clear boundaries between facts and fiction, scientific and artistic questioning of the essence of history. When we talk about war film *per se*, it is necessary to define the genre and its differences in relation to historical film. In general, war film is a genre of a special interest for the state, especially as a propaganda tool.

The body of my thesis is divided into three chapters; each chapter dedicated to a particular film, with two brief overviews of the political and cultural context in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and 1960s. The first chapter covers a film *Kapetan Leši* (*Captain Leshi*, 1960) as an example of the Westernization of war film both in cultural and generic contexts. This film

became very popular due to its Hollywood-like stylization and for a long time was considered to be politically unproblematic, in spite of the fact that it was censored by the state's institution in charge. At its core *Captain Leshi* is a story about the conflict between Albanian communists and Albanian nationalists in Kosovo and Metohija, the part of Yugoslavia which will after 1960 be marked with growing nationalism and requests for independence. The second chapter is dedicated to *Bitka na Neretvi* (*The Battle of Neretva*, 1969), the most expensive Yugoslav film directly supported by Tito, the Yugoslav army and a large number of companies. This type of film reveals the state ideology and the way in which different nations were integrated into the collectivist spirit of the partisan movement. In the final and third chapter I discuss film *Zaseda* (*The Ambush*, 1969) as an example of demystification of communist revolution and debunking of illusions about liberation fight during WWII. This banned film was an open reaction to student protests in 1968 which alarmed the ruling elite and were caused by the economic crisis, differences between the poor population on one side and privileged political elite on the other, as well as by the growing nationalisms in different parts of the country.

This thesis will demonstrate how the war films represented the failure of Yugoslav government in integrating different nations into a supranational Yugoslav society in which conflicts between different social agents (the state, workers and peasants) will finally be resolved. Regardless if war film was used as a propaganda tool (*The Battle of Neretva*), a reflection of concealed national tension (*Captain Leshi*), or a tool of criticism (*The Ambush*), between the structures of the state and the films in question there is a tension because of the discontent of the political leadership with the cinematic vision of war and revolution. As a result of this tension *Captain Leshi* and *The Ambush* were attacked by the state officials because in these films Yugoslav society is not shown without internal conflicts, while on the other side apotheosis of partisan liberation fight in *The Battle of Neretva* did not produce the reaction of the audience that the government expected and hoped for when it decided to support the film. Films perpetuate the war with other, cinematic weapon: different artistic poetics collide, but, even more importantly, a fierce conflict takes place between the state and

the film. In the end, both sides suffer losses: films get censored, directors get punished, but the state also loses its credibility and democratic reputation.

Asymmetrical comparison of these films is determined by the diversity of sources, which means that one film has more sources on the censorship, while the other is better researched in terms of its production. As far as secondary sources goes, although war film is present in almost every other wealthier world cinematography, the number of books containing studies of this genre is relatively small, mostly limited on collection of essays about American war film. As a rule these essays are more oriented towards the theory of the genre, than they are on the relationship between history and film. The book *Jugoslovenski ratni film* (*Yugoslav War Film*) by Yugoslav film critic Milutin Čolić is valuable for theoretical definition of the genre, but otherwise it is a collection of rather poorly argumented reviews published in newspapers; nonetheless, it remains quite useful for historical approach to the topic. Denise J. Youngblood's take on Russian war cinema provides an assessment of the relations between the genre and even stricter state control; unfortunately, without enough space for a more detailed analysis of certain films. A recently published MA thesis at the University of Belgrade, *Ideology of Film Image* by a Serbian sociologist, Nemanja Zvijer, charts a respectful comparison of Yugoslav partisan spectacles as a carrier of state ideology. My aim is to expand the parameters of research to films which had a more or less critical attitude towards state ideology, in order to register intellectual agendas with which filmmakers addressed serious political issues; in my opinion, they often showed more sensitivity than the politicians. Each of these films will be reviewed from a different angle - by examining previously unscrutinized documents that prove the censorship of *Captain Leshi*; detecting intellectual ideas that inspired Živojin Pavlović, the director of *The Ambush*, to make a war film closely related to Yugoslavia in 1968; applying the concept of political religion to outline the process of sacralization of the state symbols in *The Battle of Neretva*. All in all, I will show that war films were not just means of representing history or entertaining larger-than-life escapades; in many (serious) respects they were ahead of their own time.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Film and History

For a long time film was neglected as a valid historical source due to a common opinion that it only offers secondary and indirect data about reality. A form of a fictional film is particularly challenging, for it seems that it cannot contain as much relevant information as one three hundred pages book with ample space for elaboration of arguments and large number of footnotes. The different treatment of film in history was initiated by authors such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari who questioned teleology of the traditional historiography: "They do not forsake history; rather, they urge the abandonment of monolithic, messianic and deterministic views toward the past, suggesting instead that the material of history takes many forms and, moreover, that these forms are not innocent nor purely 'objective.'"[3]

Studying the ways in which film can witness about the reality, Marc Ferro came to four important elements of this relation. First one is content, through which society presents itself in both positive and negative way. In the first case film shows how the society observes itself, while in the other some discrepancies exist between how society views itself and the image of the society on film. The second element is style, which creates significant interpretive differences depending on the camera angles, costume, editing and other characteristics of film expression. Society is often influenced by film through the third element, different forms of cinematic interventions: mobilization of the masses, indoctrination, glorification, etc. The forth element is the way in which social agents interpret films, emphasizing some semantic levels while overlooking others. Ferro's main point is that film is not just a clean reflection of social processes, but also an image of what a society

[3] Marcia Landy, "The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media," 2001, in: Marnie Hughes-Warrington (ed.), *The History on Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 42.

might be hiding from itself or from its members.[4] Therefore, film is applicable as an indicator of ideological manipulations in political systems which have a desire, but are not quite ready to control its every segment.

Another theoretician, Pierre Sorlin, derived a conclusion from a well known fact that film cannot always show what its authors desire: "no society ever appears on the screen as it is, but according to the requirements of the expressive devices of its time, the director's choices, the audience's expectations, and the very idea of cinema."[5] Film is not limited only with its physical possibilities, but also with what it is allowed to show, that is the visible side of a society: "The visible side of an epoch is what image makers try to grasp in order to transmit it, and what audiences accept without surprise."[6] The bigger the need of one superior body to control its own image, the bigger are the limitations for the horizon of the film camera: "Cinema does not represent a society, but what a society considers representable."[7] In the previous sentence word society could easily be replaced with the word state in order to define the relationship of Yugoslav authorities towards film, especially in the period from 1945 until 1950.

The main cause of dependency of the film on the society is its economic basis. Although French film theoreticians gathered around a journal *Cahiers du Cinema* in the 1950s, proclaiming the director with a clearly defined style as a film *auteur*, it should not be neglected that even the most gifted directors depend on many financial, bureaucratic and technological factors. That is why I do not analyze films in this thesis as work of a dominant author, because it will be shown that even the most provocative director, Živojin Pavlović, could not have accomplished his ideas without the producer that had to coordinate business, artistic and political interests. Film is a field of cultural activity specific for its synergy of the

[4] Marc Ferro, *Cinema et histoire*, 1977, in Francesco Casetti (ed.), *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995* (Austin: University of Texas, 1999), 129.
[5] Pierre Sorlin, *Sociologie du cinema*, 1977, in: Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, 129.
[6] Sorlin, *Sociologie du cinema*, in: Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, 129.
[7] Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, 130.

film crew, their financiers and unpredictable filming process. Final version of the film is rarely something that all of its makers planned to smallest details.

When it finds itself in the middle of social interaction, film inevitably becomes a part of a political system and can be analyzed in the context of its relationship with the political government; cooperation and conflicts amongst filmmakers themselves, and revalorization of values of the system that is facing itself. This does not mean that film is powerless and dependent on politics, given that in a way it shapes audience's point of view and because of it often gets recognized as a weapon of propaganda or the defiance against the government. A good example of propagandistic instrumentalization is a documentary *Triumph of Will* (1935), a unique case in which director's concept determined the flow of history, instead of history influencing the content of the film. According to Leni Riefenstahl, "preparations for the Party's congress were being done in harmony with filming preparations."[8] Film also has an important symbolic role as a tool of resistance against the repressive government in expressing political discontent. Of course, one should not keep false hopes that film on its own is capable of motivating viewers for political activism because it does not have that hypnotic power.

Although motion pictures only sometimes affect the course of history, they have enough power to testify about the past. Analyzing the relationship between film and written text in history writing, Hayden White defined the concept of historyo*photy* (the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse) as opposed to historio*graphy* (the representation of history in verbal images and written discourse). White notices that new technological era brought ample visual sources which must be studied in a different way then written ones, without imposing a complex of inferiority of the former in the comparison to the latter: "Every written history is a product of processes of condensation, displacement, symbolization, and qualification exactly like those

[8] Tomislav Gavrić, "Istorijski metod i istorija filma" ["Historical Method and Film History"] *Novi Filmograf* 7-8(2009/2010): 131.

used in the production of a filmed representation. It is only the medium that differs, not the way in which messages are produced."[9]

Robert Brent Toplin also came to a similar conclusion, noticing that historians expect from films every bit of comprehensiveness they see in books: "Films and written discourse can complement each other nicely, but one is not a substitute for the other."[10] Imagistic evidence must be recognized as having its own specificity before asking for its accuracy. Hayden White challenges Ian Jarvie's essentialization of historiography ('debates between historians about just what exactly did happen, why it happened, and what would be an adequate account of its significance')[11] by deconstructing the myth of a historical fact: "Events happen or occur; facts are constituted by the subsumption of events under a description, which is to say, by acts of predication."[12] In a history that studies interpretation of events, language is equally good foundation for fictionalization as well as film image; the difference between narrating about some large-scale event, like war, and visualization of the same event lies only in the level of concreteness: both approaches are characterized by a certain point of view and fragmentariness. In fact, in this modern age when video technologies dominate written, historiographical narratives seem too linear and not sensitive enough for contemporary multidimensionality.[13] Media revolution brought us to the point where we must ask ourselves if the text-based historian became an endemic species: "Given a society in which reading, particularly serious reading about the past, is increasingly an elitist endeavor, it is possible that such history on the screen is the history of the future."[14]

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[9] Hayden White, "Historiography and Hitoriophoty," *American Historical Review*, vol. 93-5(1988): 1194.
[10] Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *American Historical Review*, vol. 93-5(1988): 1215.
[11] White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," 1196.
[12] White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," 1196.
[13]R.J. Raack, "Historiography as Cinematography: A Prolegomenon to film Work for Historians," *Journal of Contemporary History*,18 (July 1983): 416.
[14] Robert Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 132.

The concept of historiophoty is especially suitable for researching history of totalitarian and authoritarian societies in which state control of historiography is very strong and visible. Due to the specificity of audio-visual syntax – variety of shots, sounds, set design – film seems as if it was made for different narration in which laws of textuality do not apply, and same goes for tendency towards absolute truth which only affirms the superiority of oppressive systems. As it was found in the research at the beginning of this thesis, today large number of people is more inclined to learn something new about history from film than from books. Film language is more receptive than historian jargon which after long periods of manipulation cannot hide that scientific "objectiveness" very often conceals a tendentious choice of written sources. The content of my thesis will show how in post-war socialist Yugoslavia some topics like violent requisition from the peasants, partisans atrocities, and unresolved nationalism were fully treated or at least hinted in several Yugoslav films while the official national historiography remained silent, which is yet another proof that quest for the truth can become almost impossible in traditional historiography, while new media (and film was that for Tito's Yugoslavia) have the potential for social critique, especially when the government did not learn how to control it.

1.2. War Film as a (State) Genre

War film is not a straightforward genre to define simply because it does not posses specific geographical characteristics like Westerns, nor does it have specific style like musicals. Additional difficulties include the similarities between war and historical films, raising problematic questions such as: is every war film historical at the same time, or do films about ancient Roman wars or science fiction blockbuster *Star Wars* also belong to this group. Yugoslav film critic Milutin Čolić thinks that "war films as their topic should have the events and heroes of this, ours [20th] century, and they should not be much older than film

itself."[15] Čolić and Susan Hayward agree that war film approaches its topic from one more personal point of view and with a lot more drama, than historical film does. War film, then, must not deal with a particular historical event. Whether it shows a military conflict or its conseqences during peacetime, war film as a rule deals with physical and ethical devastation of its heroes who had more or less directly participated in war. This genre is usually realistic, although there are more alternative war films with poetic overtones, such as *Ivanovo Detstvo* (*Ivan's Childhood*) by Andrei Tarkovsky. Based on the cause of bloodshed, wars as well as war films may be civil, international, religious, political, economic, but usually all these factors intermingle. Finally, war film very easily adopts various components of other genres; the best illustration for this claim may be one of the films analyzed in this thesis, *Captain Leshi* which posesses many of attributes of Western films. Many examples of the genre were "contaminated" with the shades of comedy, while in other cases war setting was just a décor for children's or a horror film.

Compared with the majority of other film genres, war film distinguishes itself by the increased interest of politicians in them, mainly for their manipulative dimension. Lenin's famous statement that the film is the most important art of them all is better known than the equally symptomatic Hitler's declaration: "Why should I draw a canon on my enemy, when I have much cheaper, and yet more dangerous weapon – film?"[16] For these reasons war film is above all political, because it represents certain political arguments and "entices and develops love towards the motherland, or hatred towards the enemy, propagating one's own successes and enemy's defeats."[17] Many states find key moments of their birth or survival in wars: the Soviet Union came into being after the Great War and Russian Civil War, Yugoslavia after World War II, Hitler's Germany produced war films in preparation for WWII. War cinema thus becomes an important tool in shaping national history and identity,

[15] Milutin Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film* [*Yugoslav War Film*] (Belgrade: Institut za film; Titovo Uzice: Vesti, 1984), 24.
[16] Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film*, 15.
[17] Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film*, 32.

since the fight for memories of war continues even after armed conflicts. By producing war films war victors try to preserve from oblivion their casualties and remind the defeated of their mistakes. Bearing this in mind, cinematography becomes a new battlefield on which spectacular *Black Hawk Down* (2001), financed directly by the Pentagon, takes place as well as some modest African films about war without a single shot fired.

Previous comparisons underscore the significance of state institutions and rulers in mastering the tools of film production, which is very visible during the war itself when, as a rule, film becomes a powerful propaganda weapon for strengthening of patriotism. In peacetime totalitarian states control the funding for the production of spectacles which are supposed to attract the biggest audience and shape the public opinion about the war; when a certain film does not suit state goals, it is banned, censored or shelved. In capitalist democracies where production companies are privately owned, mechanisms of control are more subtle, yet still present, mostly through support of the army or stressing of stories that entice the audience to stronger militancy. War cinematography is far from absolute compliance to the ruling elite. Even in rigid dictatorships like Stalin's there were directors who motivated audience to view the war in more complex terms. On numerous occasions films about war past have served as an allegory about contemporary problems, while connotations of other accomplishments surfaced only decades after the premiere. Thus, it would not be exaggeration to claim that war film represents clashes of collective and state representations of war with individualistic recollection of history.

There are several reasons why war film occupied a special place in Yugoslav cinematography, and they are all similar to its Soviet counterpart.[18] First, the socialist Yugoslavia was born out of a war (WWII) and it disappeared into war during the 1990s. Secondly, WWII in cinematic form served as the rationale for maintaining integrative policy that helped Yugoslavia in resisting strong enemies like Stalin's USSR. Thirdly, the political

[18] Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 3.

rhetoric of Tito's Yugoslavia was full of militant phrases like: "foreign enemies, domestic traitor, fifth column;" with the help of similar vocabulary a state of emergency was maintained at all times as well as the readiness to defend the country from any opponent that the leadership saw as threatening. Finally, Yugoslav filmmakers had an opportunity to speak up about the war legacy the way historians could not. The official historical literature, mostly based on Branko Petranović's work, could not have dreamed about writing on partisan crimes which Živojin Pavlović showed in *The Ambush*. Therefore, in the discourse of Yugoslav war films "*authenticity* is more important than *accuracy* in assessing the historical merits of a particular film."[19] Given the level of freedom Yugoslav directors enjoyed in the 1960s, their historiophoty becomes unavoidable in the analysis of the history of this period.

1.2.1. War/Partisan/Revolutionary Film?

Although at first glance it might be seen as terminological cleanliness, I wish to clarify why in this thesis I employ the term "war film," rather than "partisan film" and "revolutionary film." The term "partisan film" is so common in colloquial use that it creates an impression, at least on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia, it is an autochthonic Yugoslav genre, which is not entirely true because films with partisans also exist in the Soviet cinematography. There are opinions that "partisan film" is a popular term unmasking the ideology of "war film," the term established by the frequent quoting of Milutin Čolić's book, "Yugoslav War Film":

> Čolić's motivation for this thematic approach might be quite political – if we imply that partisan films are a genre, that might mean they are primarily constructed as films and as narratives, but if we look at them as "war films", it is easier to imagine that they are true to the historical war, one of ideological stalwarts of Yugoslav mainstream/regime criticism and filmmaking. Films about partisans' struggle and revolution (2nd World War in Yugoslavia) should tell the truth about history and therefore define Yugoslavia's identity both in present and in the future. To put it briefly, not

[19] Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films*, 3.

stressing the genre nature of partisan films is functional in avoiding the undermining of the films' claim to historical truthfulness or, at least, verisimilitude.[20]

Apart from the possibility that "war film" presupposes a higher degree of credibility, I contend that various Yugoslav films about war could not easily be categorized in the same group with so-called "partisan films" because in former films demythologization of partisan fight is taking place. Politically provocative films of the Yugoslav Black Wave, led by Živojin Pavlović's *The Ambush*, are consistently opposing typical partisan films like *The Battle of Neretva*, not just on the level of historical interpretation, but also from the aspect of formal visualization. Therefore it would be more correct to treat *The Ambush* as an anti-partisan film, that is, a war film which does not follow the genre's matrix of the partisan film. For these reasons I prefer the term "war film," although I will use it interchangeably with "partisan film" whenever ideology of the latter is not disputable.

The specificity of the partisan freedom-fight in Yugoslavia was not only the war against the occupation like in some other Eastern European countries (e.g. Poland or USSR), but also a battle for the communist revolution which continues even after the formal end of the war. Therefore some of the Yugoslav film historians (Ranko Munitić, Čolić) considered that *differentia specifica* of the Yugoslav war film is exactly the combination of narratives about war and revolution. Moreover, Munitić argues

> that in the historic and poetic core it is impossible to differentiate freedom-fight of Yugoslav people from what came after it [i.e. revolution], not only because it was the logical continuation of the fight, but also because the sense or the spirit of the movement remained the same.[21]

In the same manner Munitić claims that the topic of discussions should not be a war film, but "Yugoslav revolutionary film." Yet, no matter how correct Munitić's emphasis of the revolution was, in this thesis I will use the terms "war film" and "partisan film" only

[20] Nikica Gilić, "Narrative and Genre Influences of the International Classical Cinema in the Partisan Films of Živorad-Žika Mitrović,"(Zagreb: article for a collection of texts on Yugoslav film soon to be published, 2012), 6.
[21] Ranko Munitić, "Jugoslavenski film o revoluciji" ["Yugoslav Film about Revolution"], *Filmska kultura* 66-67 (1969): 5.

because the genre is tied to the historical period of the WWII, but one should not forget the revolutionary component either, especially because it is present both in theory and practice of the filmmakers themselves.

2. *Kapetan Leši* (*Captain Leshi*, 1960) by Živorad Mitrović: A Censored War Film

2.1. Political and Cultural Context of the Yugoslav Cinematography in the 1950s

There are three important factors for the development of Yugoslav war film: after WWII the administrative management of cinematography under the ever watchful eyes of the communist Party and Josip Broz Tito himself; the conflict between Tito and Stalin in 1948 after which Yugoslavia opened up to the West; and the introduction of self-management in Yugoslav economy. Throughout his rule Tito showed great interest for the seventh art, emerging from it being his favorite pastime. Tito's private cine-operator stated that there were years when Tito watched one film per day, enjoying mostly Westerns.[22] There are indications that the Yugoslav leader watched films that were screened at the biggest Yugoslav film festival in Pula prior to official premiere and that the award-winning film had to receive his approval beforehand.[23] On one occasion, the director Vladimir Pogačić was unexpectedly invited to a screening of his own film in Tito's residence, where he received positive criticism from Tito and his closest colleagues who where essentially giving his film

[22] Ž. Štaubringer, "Tito o filmu – filmski radnici o Titu" ["Tito about Film – Filmmakers about Tito], *OKO* May 19-June 2, 1977, 14.
[23] Mila Turajlić, *Cinema Komunisto*, documentary film (Serbia: Dribbling Pictures and Intermedia Network, 2010).

a screening permit.[24] In spite of this direct interference, Tito never requested glorification of his own character the way Stalin did in Soviet films.

Culture in the newly freed Yugoslavia, including film, was at first controlled by Party's committees like *Odeljenje za agitaciju i propagandu* (Department for agitation and propaganda, or AGITPROP). In 1946 a *Komitet za kinematografiju* (Committee for Cinematography) was founded and it was supposed to organize film production and education, opening of new cinemas, as well as the importation and exportation of films. This Committee established an array of departments which bureaucratized cinematography. Only state-run companies established on the republic and state level could produce films. Committee-appointed managers of these companies approved screenplays, chose directors and approved the casting. During the filming process, the Committee supervised the work of the film crew, and gave instructions for editing of the dailies.[25] Since the policy of the state financing all the films became unsustainable after the conflict between Yugoslavia and USSR, one could hear call for decentralization of film production which was later tied to political decentralization. Certain republics refused to allow the closure of filming studios under the false economic saving pretense,[26] whilst filmmakers got the status of a "freelance film worker" meaning that from that moment onwards they themselves had to negotiate business contracts with producers in a fierce competition for every single film.[27] In 1950, the question of the commercialization of film was raised. The first step in that direction was the suspension of Committee for Cinematography, which helped downsize the bureaucracy. The state allowed the establishment of cinema companies and supported the import of films in

[24] Vladimir Pogačić, *Definitivno, imaginarni zapisi* [*Definitely, Imaginary Notes*,] (Novi Sad: Prometej; Belgrade: YU film danas, 1996), 260-261.

[25] Radenko Ranković, *Organizacija jugoslovenske kinematografije u administrativnom periodu* [*Organisation of the Yugoslav Cinematography in the Administrative Period*] (Novi Sad: Novosadska arena, Zvezda film, 2004), 47.

[26] Goran Miloradović, "Domaci trileri u inostranoj reziji: Obavestajne i saboterske aktivnosti protiv jugoslovenske kinematografije 1945-1955" [Domestic Thrillers Directed by Foreigners: Intelligence and Saboteur Actions against the Yugoslav Film Industry, 1945-1955], *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 1(2010): 77.

[27] Ranković, *Organizacija jugoslovenske kinematografije*, 64.

order to gain more funding for domestic production through taxes.[28] That is how the conflict with Stalin and economic unsustainability forced the state to relinquish its rigid control of cinematography.

The Informbiro period left its mark on war film as well. The first Yugoslav feature film after the war was *U planinama Jugoslavije* (*In the Yugoslav Mountains*, 1947), directed by the Soviet director Abram Rom. Producers of this social-realist story about brave partisans and the Red Army were Mosfilm and Yugoslav companies, but for political reasons it was deleted from the Yugoslav film history. The first film of the communist Yugoslavia was thereafter proclaimed to be war film *Slavica* (1947), directed by Vjekoslav Afrić who was interested in the emblematic motive of sacrificing an individual in the interest of the collective. Afrić changed the historical image of Rom's work, since in *Slavica* war victory is celebrated without Stalin's portrait. Later on, in partisan films, the Red Army is barely even mentioned, giving the false impression that the Yugoslav communists defeated the occupiers and collaborators completely on their own.[29]

The break from the USSR brought significant changes in cultural politics, as well as opportunities for cooperation with the West. During the Third congress of Yugoslav Writers Association in 1952 Miroslav Krleža, backed up by the political elite, called Zhdanov and Stalin "engineers of the souls" and opened the space for modernist experiments in all arts.[30] Truth be told, that space still remained very narrow during the 1950s, as can be seen in the cancelation of rehearsals for Becket's play *Waiting for Godot* which was rejected as too pessimistic - but it brought positive changes in the 1960s. In addition to adopting certain cultural liberties, Yugoslavia opened its market for the import from the capitalist countries. This greatly impacted the film industry as is evident in the fact that in 1957 only 7.6% of the

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[28] Ranković, *Organizacija jugoslovenske kinematografije*, 65.

[29] Aleksandar Vranješ, *Partizanski filmovi i propaganda* [*Partisan Films and Propaganda*] (Banja Luka: Glas srpski, 2008),

[30] Miomir Gatalović, *Darovana sloboda: Partija i kultura u Srbiji 1952-1958* [*Given Liberty*: *Party and Culture in Serbia*, *1952-1958*] (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2010), 67.

audience watched Yugoslav films.[31] American films suppressed the Soviet ones from the repertoire, winning the affection of the audience. The most popular American genre was Western (in Zagreb there was even a John Wayne Club),[32] which will in many aspects influence Yugoslav war films. This impact will be considered in further detail in the next chapter.

The proclamation of self-management for state economic doctrine combined with the aforementioned reorganization of cinematography created necessary conditions for the establishment of smaller production enterprises. Large state-owned studios (Avala film in Belgrade, or Jadran film in Zagreb) spent too much time deciding to which project they should give funding, forcing some filmmakers to join their forces in the first smaller filming company, the *Udruženje filmskih umetnika Srbije* (Association of Film Artists of Serbia, henceforth UFUS), founded in 1953. In a meeting with Edvard Kardelj, one of the co-founders of UFUS, the director Jovan Živanović, called upon the law that stated that a group of citizens is permitted to form an enterprise, thus destroying the monopoly of state-owned filming companies which were at that time trying to sabotage their new opponents.[33] The first UFUS production was a war film, *Poslednji most* (*The Last Bridge*, 1954), directed by the German director Helmut Kautner. This film, co-produced with an Austrian partner, was criticized from various sides in Yugoslavia; only to receive appraisals after it won the Cannes Film Festival award. The success of UFUS opened the door for the establishment of new, very competitive companies. However, the freedom of film author had its limits: smaller production companies had a board of directors composed of managers which defended both

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[31] Zoran Janjetović, *Od "Internacionale" do komercijale: Popularna kultura u Jugoslaviji 1945-1991.*[*From International to Commercial: Popular Culture in Yugoslavia 1945-1991*] (Belgrade: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2011), 182.
[32] Radina Vučetić, "Kauboji u partizanskoj uniformi: Americki vesterni i partizanski vesterni u Jugoslaviji sezdesetih godina 20. veka" ["Cowboys in Partisan Uniforms: American Westerns and Partisan Westerns in Yugoslavia in the 1960s"], *Tokovi istorije* 2(2010), 132.
[33] Goran Miloradović, "Glas 'likvidirane generacije:' Autorizovani intervju sa filmskim rediteljem Jovanom Jocom Živanovićem" ["The Voice of 'Liquidated Generation:' An Authorized Interview with Film Director Jovan Joca Živanović"], *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 2(2010): 91.

their own financial as well as Party's interests. Every company had an art council whose members, mostly artists, approved screenplays for filming. Nevertheless, organizational changes gave rise to results; in parallel with the gradual weakening of the control system in smaller production companies, directors searched more and more for new expression, especially in war films. Examples of this genre from the 1950s slowly evolved from the ideological glorification of the partisan movement aiming to existentialist re-examination of the past as in the film *Daleko je sunce* (*Sun is Far Away*, 1953). The true detour came with the emergence of idiosyncratic director, Živorad Mitrović, and his mixture of the war film and Western.

2.2. Creation of a Private Hollywood

Born in 1921 in Belgrade, the director of *Captain Leshi*, Živorad "Žika" Mitrović, was fascinated with the American comic books and film ever since his childhood. As a young author of comics, in 1938 Mitrović published a western comic *Duh prerije* (*The Ghost of the Prairie*) in the comic magazine *Donald Duck*, and later continued collaboration with other Yugoslav comic magazines.[34] He invested earnings from drawing comics in private lessons of English language. Soon after he got subscribed to American film magazines *Cinematography* and *Hollywood Report*, from which he drew first lessons about filmmaking. Since there was no film school in Yugoslavia immediately after the war, Mitrović approached the chairman of the Film Committee Aleksandar Vučo, who was impressed by Mitrović's knowledge and hired him to film a documentary about the army.[35] Thus started a very successful career of a director who held a Yugoslav record of twenty feature films.

[34] Zdravko Zupan, *Vek stripa u Srbiji* [*The Century of Comics in Serbia*] (Pancevo: Kulturni centar, Galerija savremene umetnosti, 2007), 28.

[35] Interview with Živorad Mitrović, accessed November 27, 2011, http://novikadrovi.net/razno/3-razno.php

After initial projects Mitrović went to Kosovo and Metohija, where he filmed the first documentary of this autonomous region, *Prve svetlosti* (*First Lights*, 1949) produced by the state studio Avala film. The film depicts cooperation of Serbs and Albanians in electrification of Kosovo, which was often perceived as a backward part of Yugoslavia; for instance, Kosovo and Metohija was one of the Yugoslav regions with the lowest health culture level.[36] Mitrović also shot the first feature film in Kosovo, *Ešalon doktora M* (*Doctor M.'s Echelone*, 1955). This was the first time that a Kosovar Albanian (Abdurahman Šalja) starred in a film.[37] Along with economic and social development problems, Kosovo was late with developing its own cinematography, so the film image of this region was devised mainly by Belgrade companies UFUS and Slavija film, the latter being a producer of *Captain Leshi*. In both of these films Kosovo was represented in stylish and idealized manner, as an alternative to a deeply rooted prejudice of Kosovar cultural underdevelopment.

Mitrović was waiting for a long time to make a feature film and finally got a chance when all other directors repeatedly failed to attract more audience into the cinema halls. After a dozen of his scripts got rejected, he found an exotic setting in Kosovo and Metohija as a background for his debut *Doctor M.'s Echelone*. In his opinion this film was a novelty for Yugoslav cinematography as not being affirmation of the notion how the country is free, and the people happy and content.[38] To his advantage, new smaller companies were based on the Hollywood principles where the main indicator of success is a box office result; in his elder age Mitrović stated that he always thought film is the "most attractive entertainment" and a "large business" which brings no success without marketing.[39] Despite Mitrović's emphasis on entertainment, the previous quote does not mean that he was politically autistic. Beside the case of censoring *Captain Leshi*, which I discuss further in the thesis, the director found

[36] Ivana Dobrivojević, "Kultura zivljenja u Jugoslaviji (1945-1955)," ["Lifestyle in Yugoslavia (1945-1955)] *Tokovi istorije* 1-2 (2008): 243.
[37] Petrit Imami, "Film na Kosovu posle drugog svetskog rata,"*Novi Filmograf* 5-6 (2008/2009): 65.
[38]Interview with Mitrović, accessed on November 27, 2011, http://novikadrovi.net/razno/4-razno.php.
[39] Interview with Mitrović, accessed on November 27, 2011, http://novikadrovi.net/razno/3-razno.php.

himself in conflict with Aleksandar Ranković[40] who attacked his World War I epic *Marš na Drinu* (*March to Drina*, 1964) for alleged propagation of Serbian nationalism.[41] Even though there was no serious persecution of the director, it should be pointed out that the film celebrated the victory of Serbia over Austro-Hungary. Similar nationalistic nuances can not be found in other Mitrović's films.

Examples of *Captain Leshi* and *March to Drina* demonstrate that the relationship between politics and film in Mitrović's works is rather ambiguous. While this conclusion may be true, it seems that Mitrović did not want to provoke and criticize the government as openly as his younger colleagues did by the end of the 1960s. Rather it was the topic selection itself – the fight against Albanian nationalists in *Captain Leshi* and Serbian triumph over stronger enemy in *March to Drina* – that made Mitrović defend himself from criticism at the time when it was almost impossible to please all of the censors and politicians with dogmatic standpoints on historical issues. Regardless of Mitrović's intention, *Captain Leshi* opened the space for opposed interpretations of nationalism and partisan movement in this film.

2.3. Being Kosovar Albanian: The Origin of Captain Leshi and His Enemies

The fictitious character of Captain Leshi was born in Prizren, a town in Kosovo and Metohija, or more precisely, Metohija. The reason why I insist on the toponym Kosovo and Metohija, instead of only Kosovo, is not only because this was the official name of the southern Serbian province until 1974, but also due to the fact that Metohija is a frequently mentioned location in *Captain Leshi*. This south-western part of the province got its name from the Greek word μετόχια, which means "monastic estates" - a reference to the large

[40] Ranković was a Minister of the Internal Affairs of Yugoslavia from 1946-1966. He was considered to be the third most powerful man in communist Yugoslavia after Josip Broz Tito and Edvard Kardelj.
[41] Interview with Mitrović, *NIN* (1993).

number of villages and estates in the region that were owned by the Serbian Orthodox monasteries during the Middle Ages. In Albanian the area is called *Rrafshi i Dukagjinit*[42] and means "the plateau of Lekë Dukagjini," a noted Albanian medieval nobleman. The names of towns and regions have always been a conflicting topic, especially if they bore a strong national or religious mark. Symbolism of the names is even more emphasized by the fact that, except for a minor role of the teacher, there are no characters of Serbian nationality in *Captain Leshi*. This is why dramatic conflict turns into intra-national war between Albanian communists and Albanian nationalists on a territory which after the war, quite surprisingly for many Albanians, remained within Serbia.

The largest Albanian paramilitary movement during WWII was *Balli Kombetar*, founded and financed by the Albanian landowners and merchants in November 1942 in Albania and then spread out to Kosovo and Metohija. With populist messages against the Italians as a major threat to the Albanian nation, Balli Kombetar attracted many sympathizers only to become an anticommunist, anti-Yugoslav and anti-Greek organization with the main goal of creating Greater Albania.[43] Members of the armed forces of Balli Kombetar called themselves ballists, representing the main villains in *Captain Leshi*.

In a desire to enlarge the anti-fascist front, in August 1943 Yugoslav communists reached an agreement with ballists that lasted only for a month. The first Albanian partisan unit was formed by the end of September 1942. Soon after, other Albanian or Serbo-Montenegrin partisan units were formed, while mixed units appeared only later during the war. Numerical supremacy of ballists in comparison to partisans might be explained by Albanian conflicts with Serbian authorities during the inter-war period, and positive signals

[42] Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Kosovo* (Lanham, Maryland, Toronto and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 119.
[43] Branislav Božović and Milorad Vavić, *Surova vremena na Kosovu i Metohiji: Kvislinzi i kolaboracija u Drugom svetskom ratu* [*Cruel Times in Kosovo and Metohija: Quislings and Collaboration in WWII*] (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991), 296.

from the Western Allies who needed help fighting the Italians.[44] When the role of the Soviets in the liberation of Yugoslavia became paramount, Allies shifted their support towards the partisans.

Mitrović surely chose ballists as the main enemies of the partisans in *Captain Leshi* having in mind their popularity amongst Kosovar Albanians during the war. Ballists play a more important role than the Germans who were the usual enemies of the partisans in war films. Except for Helmut, an atypical deserter, who joined the ballists, Germans are seen only at the beginning of the film when they are easily captured thanks to Leshi's cunningness. The main difference between Germans and ballists is that the latter's idea of independent Kosovo continued to exist well after the war, and therefore presented a serious threat to Yugoslav federation.

Another important national issue in *Captain Leshi* is the absence of Serbian characters. By excluding Serbs who fought in Kosovo both as partisans and chetniks, the director avoided the trap of a stereotypical story about a conflict between two nations in which he would have been forced to choose the "good" and "bad" guys, i.e. more and less advanced culture. By opting for the conflict between the communists of Albanian descent and Albanian nationalists Mitrović alluded that the civil war between Albanians decided the form of the state that was to be built in Kosovo and Metohija. As it was already pointed out, *Captain Leshi* contains many elements of the Western genre, and now question remains whether this cinematic civil war resembled American Civil War in the Westerns.

[44] Božović and Vavić, *Surova vremena na Kosovu i Metohiji*, 303.

2.4. *Captain Leshi* as a Kosovar Western

For the purpose of analysis of national representation in the framework of Western genre it is important to note that the screenwriter/director Živorad Mitrović did not specify nationality of the characters in *Captain Leshi*, maintaining the general division of communists and nationalists. However, their descent can be inferred according to their names and some biographical data, leading to an interesting conclusion: unlike the mainstream spectacle *The Battle of Neretva* in which characters of different nationalities support Yugoslavism of the partisan movement, in *Captain Leshi* one nation dominates.

In order to better follow my arguments about elements of the Western in *Captain Leshi*, as well as the censoring of the film discussed in the next sub-chapter, I will first offer a summary of the film. The story begins with Captain Leshi's voice-over explaining that the partisans are trying to break fierce German resistance in Prizren. The German Colonel Becker thanks Kosta and Leshi's brother Ahmet, leaders of the ballists, for their collaboration in the fight against the partisans. With the permission of his superior officer, Major Demir, Leshi and his platoon disguise themselves as German soldiers and capture Becker. Leshi's happiness is spoiled by the information that Ahmet met with Colonel Becker.

Leshi is considered to be a walking legend in his hometown. An innkeeper asks him to sell the only piano in Prizren, owned by Leshi's wealthy family, but Leshi refuses. A beautiful professor Vida asks Leshi to lend the piano to her school for music classes. Leshi invites her to the house that belonged to his deceased father to show her the piano his father bought for his talented brother Ahmet. Being a great womanizer, Leshi tries to kiss Vida, but she breaks away from his embrace. Leshi tells her that he can not give her the piano anyway, because his father bequeathed it to Ahmet.

In the biggest Prizren tavern everybody salutes Leshi. A singer Lola attracts Leshi's attention with her melodious voice and he sleeps with her. The following morning Leshi protests to Major Demir for not allowing him to chase Ahmet, whom he considers to be a

traitor. In the family house Leshi recalls how two years ago he joined the partisans, while soft and seemingly indecisive Ahmet was afraid of going to war. Leshi wonders why Ahmet ended up with the ballists.

Despite Ahmet's reluctance, the ballists attack the partisan headquarters in a small village, but partisans fight back and capture a ballist who reveals to Leshi that Ahmet has never killed anyone. Encouraged by this discovery, Leshi goes alone after Ahmet, soon finding the traces of another ballist who takes him to Kosta's squad in the mountains. Ahmet tells Leshi that he joined the ballists because their family was under constant suspicion and interrogation after Leshi became a partisan. Ahmet gave his word to stay with the ballists even after the Germans' retreat. Following a shootout after Kosta's refusal to surrender, Ahmet leaves with Leshi.

Demir criticizes Leshi for provoking Kosta's retaliation and killing three partisans after the shootout. Leshi comes up with a plan for infiltration in Kosta's lines. Next day the news is announced that Ahmet was hanged. Pretending to be enraged by the alleged gruesome event, Leshi joins Kosta's people to get revenge. Sok, Leshi's war friend, reports to Demir about Leshi's activities. Eventually, Sok knowingly lets the ballists capture him and tells them that the communist army, supported by peasants, started a large-scale action for destroying all ballists.

Back in Prizren, Demir rejects Ahmet's request to help Leshi, urging him to stay away in a safe place and let Leshi finish his job. Nonetheless, Ahmet can not sit still so he escapes with Vida's help. A German deserter, Helmut, who stayed with the ballists, suggests Kosta cross the Yugoslav-Greek border. Therefore, Kosta orders Sok to arrange an escape with the ballist committee in Skopje. Sok reports this information to Demir, who instructs him to bring Kosta's people to a village near the border.

Kosta invites Lola, his old love, to escape with him to Greece. Kosta's courier warns Lola that he might have seen Ahmet in Vida's house, though everybody thought he was executed. At first Kosta is glad to meet Lola after so much time, but gets distant when he

remembers that she slept with many men, albeit in his best interest as she claims. When ballists finally reach the border, Kosta strangles Lola for concealing the fact that Ahmet is alive, a secret she kept after Kosta hurt her feelings. The ballists are ambushed by the partisans who start shooting after Kosta refuses to surrender. Ahmet, who followed Kosta's squad all the time, kills Kosta. Leshi embraces Vida, while Demir forgives Ahmet for his disobedience.

In a wide spectrum of western sub-genres *Captain Leshi* can first be categorized in a group close to the so-called Easterns, which were mostly Soviet films set in the steppes or Asian parts of the USSR during the Russian revolution, or the following Civil War. These films relied heavily on the use of Western iconography, including horse chases across the desert, shooting from a revolver, participation of indigenous Caucasian people, etc. The largest number of Soviet Easterns was produced in the 1970s, preceded by Samsonov's film *The Burning Miles* (1957) at the time when the term Eastern was not yet coined. Since Mitrović's first film with the elements of Western, *Dr M's Echelone*, was premiered in 1955, followed by *Captain Leshi* in 1960, it could be said that his films preceded Easterns in their connection to the revolution and the civil war, as well as style characteristics.

However, ideological foundation of *Captain Leshi* was significantly different from Hollywood Westerns in the 1950s, as well as from more similar films in Eastern Europe. First, *Captain Leshi* is not a parody of the Western, nor the ironical modification of the genre in the way DEFA films from the 1960s were. In these East German Red Westerns, inspired by the literature of Karl May, Indians were given the main role in the fight against the cowboys: "…Karl Marx rather than May, the international solidarity of the oppressed, and anti-imperialist sentiments provided the answer to the quest for identity."[45] In *Captain Leshi* there are no such anti-imperialist and anti-American notes; as was pointed out, American

[45] Tim Bergfelder, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 203. There are indications in Bergfelder's book that some of these Red Westerns represented "resistance against socialism as a 'form of alien domination'" which suggests that these films "may have been open to multiple and even resistant, ideological readings." (ibid.)

Westerns attracted the Yugoslav film audience, and Mitrović himself was in love with the genre.

Second, *Captain Leshi* was not tailored according to the pattern of Hollywood "classic" Westerns from 1950s in which "a confident vision of the grand sweep of American history as an inevitable, onward march of progress is lost."[46] Experiences from WWII left a mark on American Western characters which "begin to display darker aspects to their makeup even as they fulfill the role of the 'hero.'"[47] Infused with much more idealism, Mitrović's film is actually more similar to 1930s American Westerns in which hero proves his loyalty to the social values by leaving society and eliminating the villain that posed a threat to it. Thus, Leshi has to go against his superior's orders to defend and regain his family's honour, and more importantly, security for a new, classless society.

Early partisan films, including *Captain Leshi*, share one essential quality with early Westerns: national cosmogenesis. According to a Croatian film theoretician Hrvoje Turković, in the world of Western "from the groups of different nationalities, languages, religions and ethical systems … an integrated society was supposed to be created, a new nation, a new setup."[48] An important step in the national cosmogenesis of the Western is harmonization of individualism and collectivism through which a hero finds his useful place in the society. All these processes, although with a communist prefix, take place in *Captain Leshi*: new Yugoslav state tries to reconcile different nations, religions and cultures, relying on the help of extraordinary individuals who will never forget that their teleological imperative is a strong State.

The strong State is even ready to forgive the hero his crudeness, as in the scene when Leshi tries to kiss the teacher, Vida. It is not by chance that the only Serbian character is

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[46] John White, *The Westerns* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 23.
[47] White, *The Westerns*, 23.
[48] Hrvoje Turković, *Filmska opredjeljenja* [*Film Preferences*] (Zagreb: Centar za kulturnu djelatnost, 1985), 140.

Vida, who comes from Belgrade and looks like a typical White Anglo-Saxon Protestant blonde from American Westerns. Vida is supposed to remind Leshi of his duty towards the collective by asking him to borrow the family piano for the local school, but at that moment Leshi is still not politically "mature" to give up on his family inheritance. As a member of the nation that claimed historical right to Kosovo ever since the Middle Ages, Vida bears some resemblance to Indians in Westerns who retreat in front of the new conquerors of the Wild West. At the same time, the Serbian teacher is inversion of the Indian characters from Hollywood films: she comes from the capital to the province in order to educate the cowboy (i.e. Leshi) how to organise the new government, starting from the beginning - education. Unlike Native Americans that are hostile towards colonized newcomers as in John Ford's classic *The Searchers*, Mitrović's natives (Serbs) are ready to construct a new national identity with Albanians-turned-communists.

Along the same line, the strong State in *Captain Leshi* is ready to forgive those ballists who are willing to prove their noble intentions, as in the case of Leshi's brother Ahmet who did not have blood on his hands, but did passively support the enemy of communism. Although Ahmet's main excuse for joining ballists was the safety of his family, in terms of social status he is very close to beys who support ballists to preserve their land ownership. In this way Mitrović transposed the archetypical Western conflict between rich landowners and poor farmers with only difference being that the land in Yugoslavia was to be collectivized.

The symbolic value of previously analyzed generic transpositions largely depends on the agents of the representation. In other words, it is very important to establish who and why represents a certain nation in the narrative. In this respect, Croatian film theoretician Nikica Gilić argues as follows:

Just as Mexicans, African Americans of, for that matter, women or North European immigrants can be said to be misrepresented and/or underrepresented in American western, it is quite clear that Albanians, Gypsies (Roma) and other Yugoslav minorities can lay the same claim. The fact that a Serb, albeit a very talented one, directs the story of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo and that two main

Albanian characters are played by a Serb (Aleksandar Gavrić) and a Macedonian (Petre Prličko) can point to the (Yugo)Slavic nationalist attempts to direct and form the minorities' voice in the new, supposedly ethnically tolerant circumstances of socialist Yugoslavia. To put it bluntly, in opposition to the narrative of Yugoslav brotherhood and unity, one might say that the Kosovar Albanians and other minorities were sometimes treated in Yugoslav films in the nationalist manner similar to the treatment of American minorities in the genre of western.[49]

In addition to Gilić's observation, I would like to stress that at the time of production there were not enough educated actors, or technical personnel in Kosovo. Commercial production could not allow a lot of experimenting with inexperienced actors. Therefore, the choice of actors was partly dictated by economic calculation, although the model of national hegemony could not be eliminated, especially since Albanian heroes in the film spoke Serbo-Croatian language for the full duration of it.

Besides linguistic, Mitrović sought stereotypization in visual aspects as well. Enemies of spotless partisans are represented as filthy and merciless, wearing traditional Albanian clothes, which underlines their conservatism. However, if partisans and ballists were to swap uniforms with soldiers of the North and South in the American Civil war, there would be no significant difference between them. For instance, ballists are hiding in the mountains resembling rocky shelters from John Ford and Anthony Mann's films. Final showdown with ballists was shot in a terrifying ambient of a nature wonder Djavolja varoš (Devil's town), in one of the typical shootouts. Of course, as all "good" cowboys, Leshi rides a white horse and shoots from a pistol rather than from a rifle. Accordingly, ballists are conservative opponents of integrational and federalist politics, just like their American counterparts, Confederate State soldiers.

[49] Nikica Gilić, "Narrative and Genre Influences of the International Classical Cinema in the Partisan Films of Živorad-Žika Mitrović"; (article for a collection of texts on Yugoslav film soon to be published), Zagreb, 2012, 10.

Shot in bright and optimistic Technicolor as anithesis to black-and-white partisan films from the 1950s, *Captain Leshi* symptomatically lacked the characters of political commisars, as well as images or slogans related to Tito. It could be argued that the director wanted to relieve the film of propaganda. On the other hand, the Yugoslav army plays a prominent role, much like in the partisan spectacles from the 1970s and 1980s, when it was represented as one of the three pillars of Tito's Yugoslavia (together with the Party and Tito himself). Consequently, Leshi stands for a soldier of the people's army, who despite his larger-than-life proportions still remains uninterested in the world of high politics. In brief, the idea of Yugoslavism in *Captain Leshi* comes from below, i.e. from the hero who is close to the people, not from above, meaning Tito or Party representatives.

2.5. Public and Critical Reception of *Captain Leshi*

Critical reviews of *Captain Leshi* ranged anywhere from appraisal from the audience to disputes for being too superficial and generic. After the premiere at Pula festival, the film was rated as "entertaining" noting that Mitrović developed his own style and became the only Yugoslav director who "intentionally and seriously creates his own audience."[50] When the film started screening in Belgrade cinemas, in 20 days "it attracted more 100,000 viewers. … And in all other cities (starting from Pristina), *Captain Leshi* was the most popular film in the past few months."[51] Unfortunately, there are no studies determining the cause of this success. According to director's opinion, "the audience was satisfying some of their needs: what they saw in American film, they could see in a domestic film, in their own language, with local actors and in a local setting."[52]

[50] (No Name), "Filmski barometar" ["Film barometer"], *NIN* , Belgrade, September 18, 1960.
[51] Dragoslav Adamović, "Domaci filmovi beleze rekordne posete," *NIN*, Belgrade, October 2, 1960.
[52]Interview with Živorad Mitrović, accessed November 27, 2011, http://novikadrovi.net/razno/3-razno.php.

Critics were mostly conflicted amongst themselves about the transposition of American Western in Kosovar ambient. Hrvoje Lisinski insisted that in the American Western "carrying a weapon is *conditio sine qua non* of the survival," while the law is established by the "individual action," contrary to the norms of Yugoslav stable society.[53] Kosovar film critic Vehap Šita "noted that Mitrović does not even know the basic elements of history and mentality of the people he is representing in the film, adding that the director did not have bad intentions and that his films will have commercial success on the international market."[54] Neither Šita, nor other opponents of Mitrović's film specified which historical context the director failed to present. Just as vague in this respect are those who praise Leshi's struggle against the "reactionists, violence and crime" which is "the acute problem of political-criminalist praxis, and not myth or history;"[55] or Mitrović's effort to destroy Yugoslav "taboo of war film as explicitly serious, tragic and difficult psychological drama."[56] It seems that critics were more preoccupied with the genre contamination which endangered the "purity" of freedom-fighting, than they were actually trying to understand Mitrović's representation of Albanian nationalism. In carefully controlled Yugoslav media ballists were not the only sensitive topic, because no one dared to write about the censorship of *Captain Leshi* before its official release.

[53] Hrvoje Lisinski, "Kapetan Leši: Jugoslavenski vestern?" ["Captain Leshi: Yugoslav Western?], *Filmska kultura* 19 (1960): 79.
[54] Imami, *Srbi i Albanci kroz vekove*, 445.
[55] Milutin Čolić, "Kapetan Leši," *Politika*, 1960, in: Milutin Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film. Knjiga druga* [*Yugoslav War Film. Vol. 2*] (Belgrade: Institut za film; Titovo Uzice: Vesti, 1984), 559.
[56] Mira Boglić, "Spektakularna historicnost Žike Mitrovića" ["Spectacular Historicity of Žika Mitrović's Films], *Filmska kultura* 48-49 (1966): 129.

2.6. Censoring *Captain Leshi*

Film censorship in Tito's Yugoslavia was based on the work of a central cinematography censorship authority called *Savezna komisija za pregled filmova* [Federal Committee for Review of Films, hereafter Committee] which consisted of roughly twenty members of various professions, from writers to police officers. The identity of the Committee members was protected: "Even if anyone could find out their true identity, it was forbidden to make that information public, so in the end the circle of people who might have this information remained very small."[57] The responsibility of the Committee was to review all filmed materials, produced in the country or imported, and to issue permits for its distribution or export. As a result of the Committee's long existence (1945-1971), the Archive of Yugoslavia holds significant documentation from which its *modus operandi* can be partially reconstructed. It is important to stress that the most valuable component of every censorship – remarks and interventions on particular films during Committee discussions - were usually not recorded in detail, perhaps due to the nature of the Committee itself.

An unusual exception from this "code of silence" is *Captain Leshi*. Previously unscrutinized primary sources demonstrate that this very popular film at the time, branded as "light fun", was censored after the finished shooting. The discovery of the re-edited voice-overs and cut out scenes from Mitrović's film gains importance when knowing that this director held the record in the number of feature films produced in socialist Yugoslavia, out of which only *March to Drina* sparked temporary conflict with the officials, while others are thought to be typical examples of commercial, popular, and uncensored filmmaking. *Captain Leshi* is attractive for analysis because it portrays the communist-nationalist conflict between the Albanian Leshi brothers, Ramiz and Ahmet, in Kosovo and Metohija at the end of WWII. I will analyze how the sensitive historical and national issues in the film were "edited" to

[57] Goran Miloradović, "Lica u tami. Drustveni profil filmskih cenzora u Jugoslaviji 1945-1955" [Faces in the Dark. Social profile of the Film Censors in Yugoslavia], *Godisnjak za drustvenu istoriju* [*Annual for Social History*] 2-3 (2004): 103.

make it more “politically correct” for the 1960s international market. My goal is to show that the censors wanted to create a homogenous memory of the war not only by idealizing partisan heroism, but also through downplaying the Kosovo Albanians’ national identity.

Before addressing the censored parts of the film, I will describe the circumstances in which the Federal Committee for Review of Films functioned. It seems that the first censorship bodies, comprised of soldiers and clerks, changed their profile in a shift from wartime to peacetime governance since “from February 1946 the burden of control of films was shifted to a circle of intellectuals loyal to the communist regime, assisted (as well as controled) by the members of state and party apparatus. The new Regulation concerning these activities was adopted in April 1949 and it stipulated that the members of the Committee were appointed by the Prime Minister of FPRY, on the suggestion of the Chairman of Cinematography Committee of FPRY, usually film experts, writers, artists, scientists, professors, etc.” after which comes a binding clause: “Appointed members are obliged to accept the duty.”[58] By hiring intellectuals, mostly writers, the ideological control gained momentum, because they were already prone to interpreting literary texts through an ideological lens.

In 1953 a new, more liberal *Uredba* (Regulation)[59] was adopted allowing the film distributors and producers to appeal in the case of the proscription of some film. From that version of the regulation, the clause on the forced acceptance of the appointment by the new members was removed, “it was no longer needed, because the stable regime, having strengthened its international position, no longer had any use of showing how fierce it is: everybody knew it was and it was not scared to show that.”[60] Additional fear of the members of this committee was also caused by Tito’s passionate cinephilia, on which Tito’s press secretary left this note: “Comrade Tito usually watched foreign films which were just

[58] *Uredba o pregledu filmova za javno prikazivanje*, in: *Službeni list* 29 (1949): 405-406. The Prime Minister was Josip Broz Tito, and the Cinematography Committee chairman Aleksandar Vuco.
[59] *Uredba o pregledu filmova za javno prikazivanje* in: *Službeni list* 19 (1953): 181-182.
[60] Miloradović, “Lica u tami,” 104.

imported and did not even have the subtitles in Serbian. In fact, he was the only one among us who could watch them whether they were in German or English."[61] Tito had, in fact, been watching films before they were censored and completely independent of the censorship process. Of course, he could not have managed to see all of the films, but the members of the Committee never knew what could end up on his menu, nor his opinion about any film in particular, especially since Tito from time to time praised some non-mainstream achievements.[62]

The fear of judgment of the party elite, and the audience itself, may have pushed the censors to be even harsher in performing their job. Legally not strictly defined, the limits of their authority and duty to protect the public morals and the communist system left them a "freedom", often too big, in the interpretation of certain films. Even today it is very hard to identify the reasons for banning the distribution of movies like Billy Wilder's *Sabrina*, or Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*. Nor is it easy to understand why the Committee insisted on editing some parts of *Captain Leshi*, while other details of the same connotation raised no alarm.

The censorship problems with *Captain Leshi* started in May, 1960 with a meeting of a Committee council which announced the following decision: "Yes, for screening in the country. No, for screening abroad." A plenary meeting of the Committee confirmed this decision, advising Slavija film "to remove the scene: proclamation of the People's court that one ballist has been executed, in order to lure the one in the forests into the trap."[63] The board of directors of Slavija film replied to the Committee that "even prior to the start of the actual

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[61] Tihomir Stanojević, *Neke zabeleske* [*Some Notes*] (Beograd: Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Kabinet predsednika Republike, IV, 5-b, dokumentacija za Titovu biografiju, 1953).

[62] The significance of Tito's opinion on Yugoslav films is represented in a documentary *Cinema Kommunisto* (2010), directed by Mila Turajlić, in which numerous film workers testify on the account of how Tito himself personally intervened on the script of the partisan spectacle *Battle of Neretva*, or how every winner of the most important Yugoslav film festival in Pula had first to gain Tito's sympathies.

[63] Archive of Yugoslavia, archival holding *Savezna komisija za pregled filmova 1944-1971*, 147-3, protocol 169: 60. The aforementioned scene is the moment when the authorities announce that Ahmet was hanged, thus enabling Leshi to pretend he wants to join the ballists.

shooting of the film the company managed to sell this film to one German company (for 170.000 DEM), through which later a serious opportunity presented itself to sell this film to Metro Goldwyn Mayer at 400,000 dollars, for purposes of distribution abroad."[64] As an illustration of how lucrative *Leshi* was, a 1960 letter from the Committee to the agency for export and import of films *Jugoslavija film* stated: "… That country [Federal Republic of Germany] represents an important market for our films … Just last year around 145.000 DEM was earned from the export into that country, and this year we expect income of more than 400.000 DEM."[65] This means that the international market value of *Captain Leshi* was almost equal to the yearly export of Yugoslav cinematography to West Germany.

The film council of *Slavija film* submitted its opinion to the Committee stating that "the content, characters and the issues dealt with in this film are simplified to a certain point and adapted to the needs of the genre to which film *Captain Leshi* belongs",[66] but they did not find any reason why the film should be forbidden for export.

The Committee denied the appeal of *Slavija film* and reiterated its first decision:

> This plenary meeting was made with newly appointed members of the Committee. Out of 21 members in total, 16 voted for the ban, and 5 against. Arguments against the ban were mostly that *Captain Leshi* is a light film genre, some form of our western, which should not be analyzed in detail.[67]

It is interesting that even the newly appointed members of the Committee were mostly against the export of the film, showing the consistency of censors' ideological views. Supporters of the film, whose names are not listed, tried to mitigate the attacks on the film by putting it in the category of western, in the same way in which film critics will later mark Mitrović's film. It is indicative that censors who defended the film equated westerns and

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[64] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 529.
[65] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 550.
[66] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 530-531.
[67] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 544.

light fun, possibly because they have been looking for a reason to approve *Captain Leshi* without paying attention to the difference between topoi of Hollywood westerns and Mitrović's film.

Finally, after extensive correspondence with the Committee, Slavija film re-edited *Captain Leshi* according to censors' suggestions, even the version for Yugoslav market. The director Mitrović considered that "there was a necessary dose of auto-censorship that was needed to be done to avoid meetings with party forums and committees with which it was not easy to deal with."[68] In the vaults of Yugoslav Archive there is no final confirmation on whether Slavija film eventually got the export permit. What is more important is that both producer and director agreed to make the suggested changes without arguing artistic freedom. Apparently, from their point of view additional editing did not jeopardize the integrity of the film, though equally important factor might have been the prospect of its financial success.

The fund of Archive of Yugoslavia contains five unsigned and undated pages of written suggestions and remarks of the Committee. Since the shooting was already finished, censors intervened mostly on the voice-overs and the segments which needed to be cut out of the film. There are no indications who wrote the original remarks or who used a pencil to amend already typed text of remarks. Also, there is no indication whether these changes were the only ones made by the Committee. Henceforth I will present the remarks of the Committee seemless to the original ones, after which I will give my comment. Handwritten comments will be marked in squared brackets.

[68] Interview with Mitrović, *Politika*, January 28, 1992.

Page 1

“GERMAN IN THE GANG

1. The scene in which the German is trying to protect Lola when Kosta is killing her is to be removed.

2. His last scene in which he is watching Skender’s corpse and shouts: “Turn off the light!” /p. 75 and 76/ is to be removed.

LESHI IS FROM THE RICH FAMILY

1. The scene in which Vida says: ‘Your grandfather was the richest merchant in Prizren, and his house was worth one thousand ducats.’ /p. 10/ is to be removed.

2. The line where the innkeeper says to Leshi: ‘Your father would come in to the pub with his carriages and he would throw money all around.”[69]

The character of a German deserter, Helmut, was obviously a problematic one for the Committee since instead of a stereotypical murderer appears a sympathetic joker who dreams about the end of war and a travel to sunny Spain. Since censors could not remove Helmut from the film completely, they tried to make him less human. His defiance of the brutal Kosta who strangles Lola with his bare hands is not shown. His pathetic exclamation: “Turn off the light!” is meant to partisans who direct the reflectors at the surrounded ballists at the end of the film. In a scene like this Helmut would seem a sensitive man who has no strength for dishonourable death. The partisans would then look like coldblooded executioners.

As for Leshi’s ancestors, according to official ideology a communist hero could never have been the heir of a bourgeois family. Nevertheless, even in the final version it is quite

[69] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 533.

obvious that Leshi comes from a rich background, since his family has the only piano in Prizren. Besides that, both Leshi brothers have to be from rich and respected families, due to the fact that in traditional and patriarchal communities only the well known might have attracted common people to their cause. This is the reason why Kosta tolerates Ahmet's "softness", whereas Demir is willing to forgive Leshi's capriciousness.

Page 2

"CAPTAIN LESH'S FIRST VOICE OVER /Right after the opening credits/

/p. 1/

NOW READS:

In the autumn of 1944 began the liberation of Kosmet[70] from the German occupation.

This story starts with the attack on Prizren and I, Ramiz Leshi, called Captain Leshi am its main character.

CHANGES TO:

In the autumn of 1944 began [HANDWRITTEN: finally, AND THEN ADDED: the final fight for] the liberation of Kosmet.

From my hometown Prizren not only Germans needed to be forced out but their allies – ballists as well. [HANDWRITTEN GUIDANCE THAT THE ORIGINAL LINE SHOULD BE PUT AGAIN: This story starts with the attack on Prizren and I, Ramiz Leshi, called Captain Leshi am its main character.]

[70] Abbreviation for: Kosovo and Metohija.

IN A DIALOGUE LIST FOR ABROAD THERE WILL BE:

Our story starts in the autumn of 1944 in a small and underdeveloped region of Kosmet, in the far south of Yugoslavia.

The new people's army and the partisan units started to [HANDWRITTEN: finally] liberate the country, fighting not only against the German occupiers, but their allies – ballists, domestic fascists."[71]

In the introduction of the film it had to be suggested that the major subversive and freedom fighting partisan campaign in Kosmet took place even before the end of the war, and that is why the Committee insists on referring to "finally" and "final fight". However, the main war operations on the territory of Yugoslavia took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Kosovo and Metohija, until the Red Army came into Serbia, remained under full control of first the Italian army and then the Germans and ballists. Similarly to writer/director Mitrović, the Committee refuses to define the nationality of ballists, the same way as in the film there is no division in Albanian, Serbian and other nationalities, although the names of the characters make this attribute obvious. In this case the Committee desires not to remind the audience of the old inter-national conflicts when facing the attempts.

Interestingly, the producer went one step further than the Committee, by replacing the word *allies* with *servants* in the final version of the film, so a line in the film goes: "From my hometown Prizren not only Germans needed to be forced out, but their servants ballists as well." This additionally diminished the significance and the power of ballists who could not have been equal to the German state; instead they just did whatever they were told to do.

[71] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 534.

Viewed from a broader historical perspective, German *servants* could not have claimed the right for an independent state while German *allies* could have hoped for that.

The dialogue lists for abroad by definition encompassed some form of simplification in order for a foreign spectator to understand the local context. If we neglect the incorrect location of Kosmet ("the far south of Yugoslavia" was actually Macedonia), a bit more problematic is the socio-cultural definition of Kosmet as a "small and underdeveloped region." The notion of "underdevelopment" might have reflected the perception of the "progressive" communist society which had little regard for the patriarchic and traditional values in Kosmet. This *region* was not considered as a *society* because of the remains of tribal communities, customs like blood feud, discrimination of women, etc. The authorities had been unsuccessfully trying to integrate Albanians in educational and political systems, clashing with the problems such as the refusal of Albanian communists to take new Party members if they did not belong to their tribe.[72] The sweeping generalizations written by a clerk working in the state censorship organization which was meant to fight nationalistic prejudices may suggest the lack of potential to change the representation of Kosovo. However, one should not exclude hypothesis that the "rewritten" lines for the foreign dialogue list were merely suggestions for strengthening the genre conventions (e.g. "small and underdeveloped" could imply a fairy-tale tone, as in expression "once upon a time") during the foreign distribution consideration process.

Talking about the issues of identity, it is striking that the question of nationality in aforementioned censors' changes in *Captain Leshi* is avoided by using syntagmas like "people's army", "partisan units", "the land" and "domestic fascists." Neither Yugoslavia, nor Yugoslav army and Yugoslav land are ever mentioned. Even the possessive pronoun

[72] Jan Pelikan, "Pristup Titovog rezima Kosovu" ["Tito's Regime Approach to Kosovo"], in Olga Manojlovic-Pintar (ed.), *Tito – vidjenja i tumacenja* [*Tito: Views and Interpretations*] (Belgrade: Institut za istoriju Srbije, Arhiv Jugoslavije, 2011), 237-238.

“our” is out of the picture (our land, our army) as if there was no name for the collective identity that would encompass all people living in Kosovo.

In Yugoslav public discourse, both written and oral, there is an interesting use of the adjective “*domaci*” (domestic) which was used to “embellish” many of the societal phenomena: domestic film, domestic football, domestic political scene, etc. To put emphasis on one nation meant to propagate nationalism or to negate diversity. What I am pursuing is not the identification in terms of one nation being part of a collaborationist movement meaning that ballists should have been named Albanians, because that would be an unnecessary extreme. The essence of the problem was that nations were not called by their real name, because there was no open disscussion on what a name signifies, and then new confusions could have been created abroad, as in the line “The new people’s army and the partisan units started to liberate the country, fighting not only against the German occupiers, but their allies – ballists, domestic fascists,” which could have been interpreted as if all Yugoslav fascists were ballists.

Page 3

“CAPTAIN LESH’S SECOND VOICE OVER /After the war/

/p. 6/

NOW READS:

A Couple of months later, in the spring of 1945, while the war was still on in Europe, the population of Kosmet tried to live as if in peace.

Many of whom the war prevented in forming their families were celebrating their marriages loudly and cheerfully.

The refugees were in a hurry to get to their abandoned homes.

CHANGES TO:

A couple of months later, in the spring of 1945, while the war was still on in Europe, the population of Kosmet was slowly returning to its peaceful life.

Those whom the war prevented in forming their families were celebrating their marriages loudly and cheerfully.

The refugees were in a hurry to get to their abandoned homes, and kids started going to school again.

In April I was assigned to work in the headquarters of KNOJ,[73] in Pec. At that time I was often stopping by Prizren, where I no longer had anyone of my own to see, but i had only friends waiting for me."[74]

[73] KNOJ (Korpus narodne odbrane Jugoslavije = Corpse of People's Defence of Yugoslavia).
[74] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 535.

Similarly to the remarks for the beginning of page 2, the Committee appreciates the general atmosphere of optimism. The war in *Captain Leshi* was *de facto* not over, but people already live “peacefully”.

Page 4

“LESHI LOOKS AT AHMET’S PHOTO

/p. 20/

NOW READS:

Demir was right: I will not have rest as long as Ahmet is in the mountains.

How deserted and dark is the house of our childhood now! And what has remained of it? One dusty crate full of old books.

Will I see my brother ever again?

Will I ever see Ahmet?

/Close up of Ahmet’s photo/

CHANGES TO:

Demir was right: I will not have rest as long as Ahmet is in the mountains.

How, the hell, did he end up there?

I know he was always soft and indecisive, but he hated violence…

[HANDWRITTEN: Add the original lines here: How deserted and dark is the house of our childhood now! And what has remained of it? One dusty crate full of old books.]

Here, from this house, I went to the fight two years ago.

Ahmet knew where I was going.

Father knew too.

[NEXT LINE IS TYPED AND THEN SCRATCHED OVER WITH A PENCIL: They knew that I stepped on that road while I was a student, they knew I will follow my friends.]

Ahmet did not join me.

He doubted, he was afraid…

[SCRATCHED LINE: He even cried…]

How did you dare to join the ballists, - explain that to me! What forced you?

And what now, am I supposed to reconcile with the fact that you are a traitor and that you are beyond salvation? [SCRATCHED WITH A PENCIL everything from the word "traitor" until the end of the line, instead "traitor" written "criminal"]

[HANDWRITTEN LINE: What happened to you, Ahmet? What made you join the ballists? THIS LINE IS "CONNECTED" TO THE REMARK about AHMET'S PHOTO]"[75]

Not every suggestion by a film censor is by default wrong and counterproductive. This page shows how the censors might have served as creative spectators and editors. Additional Leshi's voiceover deepens his misunderstanding of his brother's behavior and intensifies superficiality of his macho attitude that *a priori* sentenced Ahmet as a coward. With a sound reasoning Leshi's leftist youth is not emphasized and Ahmet's ridiculous cry is also avoided. Even the distinction between "traitor" and "criminal" fits into the dramaturgy given that the latter term might be associated with something more cunning from the rather arbitrary category of the "traitor."

Page 5

"LESH RIDING A HORSE, AFTER INTERROGATION OF THE WOUNDED BALLIST

/FIRST RUN-IN WITH THE GANG /

/p. 28/

NOW READS:

Message for Major Demir: I learned that Ahmet never really became a ballist.

I am going to find the gang because of that.

[75] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 536.

I will go towards Rugovo.

Through Ahmet I will try to negotiate the terms of their surrender.

My condition will be: they give us their weapons, we give them a public trial – then what happens, happens.

The ones who are caught later, will not make it alive.

CHANGES TO:

Message for Major Demir: I learned that Ahmet never really became a ballist.

I am going to find the gang because of that.

I will go towards Rugovo.

Through Ahmet I will try to negotiate the terms of their surrender.

I hope that the gang is already demoralized.

A ballist I have interrogated said that beys and wealthy peasants object that they are feeding Kosta for free. We, they say, got the whole villages, and now their land will be given to the poor peasants! [LAST LINE SCRATCHED WITH A PENCIL, AND INSTEAD OF IT WRITTEN: Wealthy peasants and beys who supported the gang, now do not give any more money doubting that the gang will ever return.]

I trust that Ahmet will help me break up the gang.

I will suggest they save their heads while there is still time – and surrender their weapons. The ones who are caught later, will not make it alive."[76]

The communist government did not want to look bad in the showdown with its enemy ("The ones who are caught later, will not make it alive."). The victor always, especially in artistic representation, wants to seem generous. In order to make the whole event complete, the defeated must be on their knees and abandoned even by the wealthy people who were never friends. Opponents of communism have only one moral – money – and that is why they are, sooner or later, doomed to clash amongst themselves.

What the case of *Captain Leshi* proves is that Yugoslav *arbitri elegantiae* were generally careful viewers. Still, between them there was a small number of filmmakers and people who knew the specificity of a celuloid medium. In the marking of films they mostly relied on their feeling or methods of analysis borrowed from literature given that there were a lot of writers amongst them. Casting away the simplifications of a genre film, the censors did not reject the influence of popular films on the audience. Although their changes were not crucial, in fact some even contributed to the narrative clarity, the members of the Committee framed Mitrović's film as a re-creation of national stereotypes. However, as *Captain Leshi* shows, the genre film is something subtly different – it is a use of stereotypes deployed in order to overcome these very stereotypes.

If we look at it today, it is hard to say why exactly the Committee forbade the export of the film in the first place. It can only be guessed that the censors feared of the foreign

[76] Archive of Yugoslavia, 147-3: 537.

spectators' interest in a problematic historical episode involving ballists. On the other hand, it seems logical that *Captain Leshi* could have caused more damage at home where the war emotions were still fresh. Yet, contrary to the Committee's expectations, the film built up to a cult status in Yugoslavia in decades to come as an entertaining hit.

3. *Bitka na Neretvi* (*The Battle of Neretva*, 1969): A State-Supported War Film

3.1. Political and Cultural Context of the Yugoslav Cinematography in the 1960s

The overall rise in living standard during 1960s brought about significant progress in Yugoslav cinematography, in quantitative,[77] as well as qualitative terms. According to the director Aleksandar Petrović, 1961 was crucial for Yugoslav film, as it "started to socialize with the world of *decadence*," incorporating tragism which represented a "showdown with ideals and illusions."[78] Together with Živojin Pavlović, Dušan Makavejev, Puriša Djordjević and Kokan Rakonjac, Petrović belonged to a generation of young film directors whose heterogeneous poetics is named *novi film* (New Film):

> While lacking a specific program or coherent aesthetic perspective, the advocates of *new film* sought: 1) to increase the latitude for individual and collective artistic and expression and to free film from dogmatism and bureaucratic control; 2) to promote stylistic experimentation in film form and film language – influenced initially by early 1960s films associated with French *nouvelle vague* and vanguard Italian cinema, and later in the sixties by *new wave* tendencies in Eastern European countries, most notably Czechoslovakia and Poland; 3) to involve film in the expression of *savremene teme* (contemporary themes), including the right to critique the darker, ironic, alienated, and gloomier side of human, societal, and political

[77] In 1968 the largest number of films has been shot in Yugoslavia during one year – thirty five.

[78] Aleksandar Petrović, *Novi film II, 1965-1970* [*New Film II, 1965-1970*] (Belgrade: Naucna knjiga, 1988), 332.

> existence; and 4) to do all of these things within the context and premises of a Marxist-socialist state – at a time in Yugoslavia's evolution when these very premises were a focal point for heated philosophical and ideological debate.[79]

The breakthrough of New Film directors was greatly eased by changes in the legislature giving greater autonomy to the filmmaking enterprises:

> Independent groups of filmmakers, organized for the production of a single work, were given the right to compete with established enterprises for subsidies in 1960. … In 1966, individual enterprises received the statutory right to participate directly in cultural cooperation with foreign countries, opening the way for direct sale of films to foreign distributors and greatly improved co-production opportunities.[80]

Younger generations of directors acquired recognition and awards at the biggest film festivals around Europe, which contributed to the liberalization of rules and regulation by the state and all in favor of their creativity. This lasted until the serious political turbulences of 1968.

As I have already mentioned in the introduction, Yugoslavia had a relatively prosperous economy during 1960s which raised the living standards in the country. The idea of self-management reconciled the goals of the working class and those of the political elite, at least from the ideological aspect, while nationalism in certain republics was kept under check and became subordinate to the generation of a unique Yugoslav identity. This period also saw the proliferation of critically oriented artistic and intellectual groups like Praxis Marxists, avant-garde painter's group Mediala or abovementioned New Film. Tito's regime succeeded in finding its way in dealing with even more serious problems like unemployment in certain parts of the country, and it even allowed the emigration of guest workers to

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[79] Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 66.
[80] Michael J. Stoil, *Balkan Cinema: Evolution After the Revolution* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 49.

capitalist countries. The government had to allow greater cultural liberties in order to maintain its image as the most democratic country in Eastern Europe.[81] Simultaneously, as a founder of the Non-Aligned movement, Yugoslavia felt an impetus to show its culture to the world, using film as one of the most attractive products.

The golden age of Tito's Yugoslavia did not last for long, amongst other reasons, also because there was no solution to be found for halted economic development; for example, not even the capital that economic emigration brought back to the country was utilized properly. Instead, it was usually invested into purchasing real-estate for guest workers' families.[82] Also, instead of unity, political reforms induced distancing of the republics. The adoption of postwar Yugoslavia's third constitution in 1963 was "an important step in the direction of political decentralization, whereby the status and prerogatives of the six republics were enhanced. … The new constitution enshrined the right of republics to leave the Yugoslav federation."[83]

The biggest political earthquake was certainly the fall of Aleksandar Ranković in 1966. After his sudden disappearance from the political scene, the once powerful internal affairs minister and vice-president of Yugoslavia became martyr in the eyes of Serbian intellectuals, who gathered around writer Dobrica Ćosić, and living proof of the alleged conspiracy against the Serbs. Given the topic of this thesis, it is crucial to distinguish between stances on national questions expressed by highly influential officials of Yugoslav government before Ranković's fall: Tito endorsed "the concept of *organic Yugoslavism* (*organsko Jugoslovenstvo*), a harmonious symbiosis between national specificity and affective attachment to the Yugoslav federal community (as opposed to the concept of *integral Yugoslavism* endorsed by Ranković, under which national specificity and affective

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[81] Nebojša Popov, in: Nebojša Popov (ed.), *Sloboda i nasilje* [*Liberty and Violence*] (Belgrade: Res Publica, 2003), 28.
[82] Božidar Jakšić, in: Popov, *Sloboda i nasilje*, 40.
[83] Sabrina P. Ramet, *Three Yugoslavias: State Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 208.

attachment to Yugoslavia were seen as antagonistic)."[84] In the spirit of organic Yugoslavism, soon after Ranković's fall Tito unofficially recognized the right of Muslims to national self-determination. This provoked the reaction of the historian Jovan Marjanović, who, supported by Dobrica Ćosić, declared at a meeting of the League of Communists of Serbia in May 1968 that "the proclamation of a Muslim nation is senseless."[85] The dispute over Muslim nation-building found its place even in *The Battle of Neretva*, which was filmed with Tito's blessing from 1967, a year after Ranković's expulsion from the party. If to a such an obvious meddling of politics into war film genre one adds provocation of *The Ambush* by Živojin Pavlović from 1969, the same year as *The Battle of Neretva*, it becomes clear how important were these films for the moment in which they were created.

3.2. 10,000 Soldiers, 75 Armed Vehicles, 22 Airplanes: Making a War Spectacle

Whatever anecdotes circled around the shooting of *The Battle of Neretva* (henceforth *Neretva*), one thing remains unquestionable – this film would have never been made without huge self-advertising by its director, Veljko Bulajić. Coming from a respectable partisan family, Bulajić differs from his colleagues Mitrović and Pavlović, because he participated in WWII, seeing the end of the war as a 17-year-old lieutenant.[86] He "had received his training at the Centro Sperimentale in Rome under the tutelage of Cesare Zavattini,"[87] so it could be said that he was under partial influence of the Italian neo-realism in an attempt to incorporate stories of the ordinary people in his historical tableaux. Bulajić attracted the attention of the audience with his film *Kozara* (1962), a partisan epic of a smaller scale than *Neretva*. *Kozara* "broke all domestic box office records up to that time, attracting 3,393,632 viewers as well as

[84] Ramet, *Three Yugoslavias*, 208.
[85] Ramet, *Three Yugoslavias*, 208
[86] Tomislav Šakić, "Filmski svijet Veljka Bulajića: popriste susreta kolektivnog i privatnog" ["Veljko Bulajić's Film World: Battlefield of the Collective and Private"], *Hrvatski filmski ljetopis* 57-58 (2009): 19.
[87] Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema..*, 57.

garnering several international awards,"[88] amongst which Moscow Film Festival award was, by far, the most important, coming from the most respectable film festival in Eastern Europe. After winning multiple awards at Pula festival, Bulajić could choose his next project, so he decided to film a story about the battle of Neretva from 1943. Shooting was first scheduled to start in 1963, but it had to be postponed because of the earthquake in Skopje, after which there were some problems with the financial construction of the project up until 1967. Therefore, it cannot be said that *Neretva* was a reaction to war films by Aleksandar Petrović, Puriša Djordjević or Pavlović, because it was more connected to the celebration of 20 years of the battle itself. By 1967 Bulajić established his almost untouchable position as a director and asked Tito to support the shooting of *Neretva*.

The reasons why Tito took upon himself to be a producer of one film might only be explained by the sense of grandeur of a humanistic story about saving wounded partisan soldiers. Tito contributed to Bulajić's film in two ways: as a consultant throughout the scriptwriting process and a generous producer who practically made Neretva a state project by urging the Yugoslav economy and Yugoslav People's Army (henceforth YPA) to extend every possible help and assistance to the film crew. Tito himself edited certain parts of the screenplay[89] and gave permission for his character to be omitted from the film. It seems as if the Yugoslav leader, advised by Bulajić, did not want to cast his long shadow on a collective struggle in *Neretva*.[90]

No other Yugoslav film ever had such generous support of the state. Following Tito's appeal 58 companies financed *Neretva* and 10,000 soldiers participated, while the film's inventory also included 75 armed vehicles, 22 airplanes and 5,000 machine guns, with a total

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[88] Dejan Kosanović, *Dvadeset godina jugoslovenskog filma 1945-1965* [*Twenty Years of Yugoslav Film, 1945-1965*], (Belgrade: Savez filmskih radnika i Festival jugoslovenskog filma, 1966), 80.
[89] Mila Turajlić, *Cinema Komunisto*, documentary film (Serbia: Dribbling Pictures and Intermedia Network, 2010).
[90] Interview with Bulajić, *Novi List*, Rijeka, June 5, 2005.

of 12,000 explosions.[91] Companies sponsoring the film Bulajić called "benefactors," claiming that they later participated in the division of the film's profit.[92] However, since the one and a half year long shooting was poorly organized, production budget began to dwindle. One of the film stars, actor Velimir-Bata Živojinović recently stated that Bulajić used to take him and his Yugoslav colleagues to different factories where, after entertaining the workers he would get additional financing from the managers.[93] Later on Bulajić claimed that he did not spend any money from Yugoslav film funds, because he managed to attract foreign producers,[94] who paid expensive foreign actors and distributed the film to the international market.[95] The final expenses of *Neretva* were never made public: "according to *Variety*, the estimated budget was 12 mil $, while the official sum was around 4,5 mil $."[96] In any case, *Neretva* is considered to be one of the world's most expensive non-English language films ever, the main reason being inefficient financial management. Bulajić simply did not spare any money in making the reconstruction of the battle as real as possible.

From a producer's point of view two aspects are important for Bulajić's filming of history: compiling the resources of all Yugoslav republics and authenticity. From the middle of the 1960s, republic film centres gained more funding so there was more discussion about Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian cinematographies, and less about Yugoslav. On the other hand, Bulajić united Yugoslav companies in production of a Yugoslav film, about Yugoslav myth with representatives from all Yugoslav nations. In this case, the working class is, at least on paper, both the producer and the audience of the film about its own historical

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[91] Sead Kreševljaković, "Veljko Bulajić iz Vilusa," accessed on April 13, 2012, http://www.film.ba/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=27

[92] Interview with Bulajić, *Dnevnik*, November 26, 1969.

[93] Igor Stoimenov, *Partizanski film* [*Partisan Film*], documentary film (Serbia: Absinthe Production, 2009).

[94] Film opening credits listed as producers Yugoslav companies Bosna film (Sarajevo) and Jadran film (Zagreb) and Kinema; then YPA, Igor Film (Italy), Eichenberg Film (Germany) and United Commonwealth (England-USA).

[95] Interview with Bulajić, *Ekspres*, Belgrade, December, 22, 1968.

[96] Kreševljaković, "Veljko Bulajić iz Vilusa".

struggle. By pushing this agenda the government tried to shape the workers' perception of war as a historical starting point of Yugoslav society.

The second aspect, authenticity, was manifested in Bulajić's unusual attempt to make a film that will in given circumstances remain physically as close to history as possible, almost identical. The director and his co-writers analyzed to the smallest detail in the written documents and testimonies pertaining to the battle[97] and shot the film in almost the same location where the battle itself took place, aiming to achieve the reconstruction of the events. In this de-fictionalization of a war film genre Tito acted as a symbolic guarantor of historical authenticity.

3.3. Partisans and the Yugoslav National Identity

Before I turn towards the iconography of *Neretva*, I would like to point out the "dramaturgical obscurity, bad plot and underdeveloped characters"[98] with extremely short appearances of stars such as Yul Brynner, or Orson Welles. Narrative lines are so poorly connected that a viewer, overwhelmed by pyrotechnical effects, has no time to identify himself with the protagonists. Still, the director's megalomania did not jeopardize the basic representation of important players in the partisan narrative. Bulajić deserves to be praised for the scenes of conflict between a man and machinery, i.e. between poorly equipped partisans and faceless German tanks and planes. The director intensified this apocalyptic conflict by using aerial shots and extreme long shots that capture endless lines of exhausted fighters looking for shelter from the omnipresent enemy.

In contrast to Mitrović and Pavlović's war films in which partisans fight with only the enemy's army, opponents in Bulajić's film they have many faces, amongst which the

[97] Interview with Bulajić, *NIN*, Belgrade, January 15, 1967.
[98] Šakić, "Filmski svijet Veljka Bulajića," 20.

German is the most dangerous. At the very beginning of the film German officers emphasize that they are fighting against partisans, civilians and their children; their obduracy is shown when they bomb schools and hospitals. Somewhat milder treatment was given to Italians, General Moreli and Captain Riva. When partisans capture the first officer and order him to carry the wounded partisans, he refuses to obey and commits suicide, affirming the typology of an arrogant fascist. Riva is a more complex character who questions the goals of fascism. When the partisans take him prisoner, he joins their cause in order to fight for "Italy without fascism." His motivation seems like a trade-off made to please Italian co-producers who helped the distribution of the film on the international market.[99] Truth to be told, Riva's conduct is also tied with real historical events, since the majority of Italian soldiers deserted after Italy's surrender in 1943.

Apart from the Germans and the Italians as foreign occupiers, *Neretva* features the "domestic traitors," ustashas and chetniks. Ustashas are shown only briefly in the scene of hanging a woman and in a couple of shootouts with the partisans. Chetniks are portrayed as more gruesome monsters. While they stand in front of an orthodox church, their political leader (Orson Welles) calls them to destroy partisans. The irrationalism of chetniks culminates in the scene when they charge the partisans with drawn sabres, riding their horses like a frenzied horde. Chetniks are the opposite of partisans, they fight amongst themselves and are completely disorganized. Therefore, their defeat seems inevitable when confronted with the partisans' unity.

Contrary to stereotypically shaped enemies, the partisans look like a fearless army drawing strength from their unity with the proud people. Glorification of the army is understandable bearing in mind that YPA was one of the main producers of *Neretva*. The director insists on humanity and sacrifice of the partisans pursuing the protection of the

[99] Nevena Daković, "Klisei ratnog filma ili ratni film kao klise," ["War Film Clichés, or War Film as a Cliché"] in: *Izazov ratnog filma* [*The Challenge of War Film*], (Kraljevo: Kulturni centar; Vrnjacka banja: Festival filmskog scenarija, 2000), 26.

wounded, although they significantly impede manoeuvring. Throughout the film partisans make important decisions in the spirit of "democracy and justice;"[100] the final decision is not made by one person, but after a discussion. Partisans are also strict with their own people: one of them is stripped of his rank and threatened to be court-martialed because he shot imprisoned chetniks who killed his best friend. These moments serve a double purpose: they ensure the viewer that wartime leaders have not made decisions arbitrarily and dictatorially, as was common in the USSR; and suggest that partisans do punish their own for any type of crime, whether petty or serious. In addition, these scenes filled out the black holes in official history writing, like the execution of ustashas in Bleiburg, or the Belgrade bourgeoisie after the liberation. Accordingly, partisans in *Neretva* are immortalized in the heat of the almost superhuman fight, while in *Captain Leshi* and *The Ambush* the main heroes try to eliminate groups of collaborators in a moment when war victory is certain. Moreover, the partisans in *Neretva* neglect class differences and lead an uncompromising fight against the enemy, whereas in the other two films partisans fight against each other, and with certain classes as well, most often landowners.

In Bulajić's spectacle the unity of partisans is embodied in the cooperation of fighters of different nations. There is no doubt that all-Yugoslav characters of *Neretva* production were related to the equality of Yugoslav nations in their cinematic portrayal. The concept of Yugoslavism is visible at the very beginning of the film, in Tito's message to the viewers which reminds them that in the battle of Neretva "brotherhood and unity of all of our nations won." When reading a proclamation, one partisan greets his "brothers, Yugoslav nations, Serbs, Macedonians, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins and Muslims." In terms of courage and dedication "all Yugoslav nationalities in the partisan army have the same treatment so that none of them stands out."[101] At first glance this cinematic brotherhood and unity "means political, economic and every other equality of different nations living on the territory of

[100] Nemanja Zvijer, "Ideologija i vrednosti u jugoslovenskom ratnom spektaklu," 34.
[101] Nemanja Zvijer, *Ideologija filmske slike. Socioloska analiza partizanskog ratnog spektakla* [*Ideology of Film Image. Sociological Analysis of Partisan War Epics*] (Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet, 2011), 142.

socialist Yugoslavia."[102] However, this impression can be tricky given that *Captain Leshi* demonstrated how hard it was for Yugoslav communists to integrate the Albanian nation in a new state. Interestingly, Albanians are not mentioned in the proclamation in *The Battle of Neretva*, while on the other hand Muslims are, though the status of this nation was just "reopened" after the Eighth Congress of LCY in 1964 and was not resolved until the 1970s.[103] Apart from the fact that the filmmakers paid extra attention which nations were welcome, one can easily notice that the concept of Yugoslav nation was not named in any of the three analyzed films. Not even *Neretva* as a state-supported film used the idea of integral Yugoslavism, opting instead for organic Yugoslavism, which protected the right to diversity between nations, but also left a lot of space for the surge of nationalisms.

With such a complex national representation, the significance of the casting process also gained importance, especially for Yugoslav actors. Unlike *Captain Leshi* in which non-Albanian actors played Albanian characters and by doing so demonstrated a certain degree of cultural hegemony, there are several roles in *Neretva* in which the actor of one nationality plays the role of a character of the other. In Nemanja Zvijer's opinion, with a casting like this

> to a certain extent the concept of national exclusivity was simultaneously undermined indirectly pointing out that the differences between Yugoslav nationalities are inconspicuous and almost insignificant. In a broader sense that could imply the fact that in that way, through film, a 'new man of socialism' was constituted, a hero and a comrade, completely freed of all the national chains and worldviews.[104]

This inspiring observation can be as legitimate as a possibility that at some point the director wanted to have his all-star acting crew complete and then just gave away the rest of the parts. This argument could be supported by the treatment of the foreign actors playing Yugoslav characters: except for the intention to sell the movie in as many countries as possible one

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[102] Zvijer, "Ideologija i vrednosti u jugoslovenskom ratnom spektaklu," 35.
[103] Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 286.
[104] Zvijer, *Ideologija filmske slike*, 144.

cannot easily find other reasons why Orson Welles had to play the role of a Serbian chetnik duke, while Sergei Bondarcuk got the role of the Slovenian artilleryman, Martin.

Speaking of Bondarchuk, it seems that the Soviet actor/director's epic *War and Peace,* which he had finished shortly before starting the shooting of Bulajić's film, was one of the aesthetic and ideological role models for *Neretva*. Even though Bondarchuk's film is set against the backdrop of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, both films share the passion for graphic battle scenes and the reconstruction of a massive historical event. In a like manner, these films depict historical-turned-mythological points in life of a nation, since in Russia the war with Napoleon is also known as The First Patriotic War, WWII being the Second. Even closer to *Neretva* was the five-part Soviet epic *Liberation* (Osvobozhdenie, 1968-1971, released 1970-1972) which, in accordance with Brezhnev's politics rehabilitated Stalin as the leader of the Liberation War.[105] The *Liberation* was also produced by the state and foreign producers and it was made to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Victory Day. On an international level *Neretva* and *Liberation* served as a reminder of Yugoslav and Soviet war victims. Another similar film would be Hollywood star-studded spectacle *The Longest Day* (1962), which glorifies exceptional soldiers, officers and politicians. For *Neretva* an opposite principle stands: "Partisans are a team without prominent individuals who are always acting together as one on their way to final victory. Later on that can imply that the collective is always and in every situation more dominant than an individual and that as such should always present the backbone of the system itself."[106]

[105] Denise J. Youngblood, *Russian War Films*,158-159.
[106] Zvijer, "Ideologija i vrednosti u jugoslovenskom ratnom spektaklu," 35.

3.4. War Spectacle as a Performance of Political Religion

My aim in this part of the thesis is to examine if *The Batlle of Neretva* can be treated as a performative representation of a historical moment established in the political religion of Tito's Yugoslavia. As ambitious as it may sound, I will first try to draw a parallel between Bulajić's film and 1920 theatre performance *The Storming of the Winter Palace* and set up a short theoretical framework for tracing the elements of performance in *Neretva*. Finally, with the help of the theoretical setup of Emilio Gentile I will investigate in which way the concepts of land, communist Party and the Leader were used in *Neretva* as a consistent platform of political religion.

Famous Soviet theatre performance *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920), directed by Nikolai Evreinov, shares a couple of common motives with *Neretva*. Both works were mass spectacles engaging an enormous number of participants in the reconstruction of important moments of communist revolution and state-building. Both theatre and film directors performed and shot at authentic locations where depicted events took place, trying to reinvigorate the spirit of historical grandeur. And last, but not least, both spectacles were supported by the states as a commemoration of moments of great sacrifice and victory in order to create a unified identity of the spectators.

The Storming of the Winter Palace was only one out of many theatre performances made immediately after the October Revolution which in terms of form and content relied mainly on mysteries, mediaeval theatre genre in which the history of the World was narrated as a teleological process marked by Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection.[107] In Evreinov's mystery, the sacrifice of the revolutionaries replaced Christ's, while the director himself wrote that religion originates in theatre, as "in order to believe in gods, man had first

[107] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 102.

to acquire the gift of conceiving these gods."[108] More importantly, Evreinov hired real participants of the revolution to act in a play about October Revolution which was much more than a classic theatre, because the "director wanted to establish a bond between the actors and the spectators so that the theatrical event turned into a 'real,' social event."[109] By erasing the border between reality and art Evreinov pointed out the strong corporal presence of the revolutionaries who play themselves, as well as the spectators who could act with the revolutionaries, and experience participation in a historical event.

The corporeality[110] of performance from Evreinov onwards often emphasized the performer's body before the role he was playing. Surely, there is a big difference between theatre/performance and film, the latter being unable to physically involve the spectator in the way former arts can. Although *Neretva* is a rather standard mimetic narrative, it exploits certain features of corporeality elevating them to a level of barely concealed religious symbolism. The most conspicuous motive in this context is the martyrological role of the wounded for whose survival partisans courageously fight in the film. The wounded people are an example of ideologization of war casualties through glorification of their suffering.[111] Wounded soldiers support their colleagues with singing, like during a strong enemy offensive when even Germans remain perplexed by the partisans' resistance. Death of the wounded and other partisans is always naturalistic, implying the pain and grief that must have been endured to earn the gift of freedom for the future generations. For this reason wounded comrades were supposed to be remembered and celebrated, just like Christian martyrs.

The wounded soldiers are one of the symbols of a specific political religion which tends to establish itself in *Neretva*. Emilio Gentile defines a rather fluid notion of political religion as follows: "*Political religion* is the sacralization of a political system founded on an

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[108] Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 99.
[109] Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 100.
[110] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 76.
[111] Todor Kuljić, *Kultura secanja* [*Culture of Memory*] (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2006), 288-289.

unchallengeable monopoly of power, ideological monism, and the obligatory and unconditional subordination of the individual and the collectivity to its code of commandments. Consequently, a political religion is intolerant, invasive, and fundamentalist, and it wishes to permeate every aspect of an individual's life and of a society's collective life."[112] There were different elements of political religion in Tito's Yugoslavia: first of all, a Youth's baton which celebrated Tito's birthday as well as his status of a leader, and facilitated "the spread of all-Yugoslav consciousness;"[113] another element was the cult of *narodni heroji* (people's heroes), prominent fighters who, with their courage and tragic death earned a secular canonization in the Yugoslav communist pantheon.[114]

It is interesting that there are no famous people's heroes in *Neretva*, which only increases the value of collectivism. For comparison purposes, in the next great partisan spectacle *Sutjeska*, one of the main characters is the people's hero Savo Kovačević, while the biggest attention is paid to Tito, who is missing in *Neretva*.[115] However, this impression might be false, simply because the physical absence of Tito suggests his discrete sacralisation.

Three important pillars of Tito's regime were "Tito himself, [communist] Party and Army."[116] Unlike the Army which produced the film, the Party is not mentioned in *Neretva*, which was most probably a compromise with foreign producers, otherwise the film would have been seen as communist propaganda.[117] As the substitute of the Party one can identify

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[112] Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), xv.

[113] Dimitar Grigorov, "Racunajte na nas:' Odlomak o Titovoj stafeti ili Stafeti mladosti" ["Count on us:' Tito's Baton, or Youth's Baton] *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* 1-3 (2008): 136.

[114] Vjekoslav Perica, "Herojstvo, mucenistvo i karizma u civilnoj religiji titoizma" ["Heroism, Martyrdom and Charisma in Civil Religion of Titoism"], in: Olga Manojlovic-Pintar (ed.), *Tito – vidjenja i tumacenja* [*Tito: Views and Interpretations*] (Belgrade: Institut za istoriju Srbije, Arhiv Jugoslavije, 2011), 582-597.

[115] It seems that Tito appears in *Sutjeska* because he was wounded during this battle, but still continued leading the partisans.

[116] Zvijer, "Ideologija i vrednosti u jugoslovenskom ratnom spektaklu," 31.

[117] Bogdan Tirnanić, "Psihologija i filozofija pirotehnickog pogleda na svet i istoriju" ["Psychology and Philosophy of the Pyrotechnical View on World and History"], *Sineast* 10 (1969/1970): 75.

the Supreme Headquarters, five-pointed stars and physically absent Tito. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav leader is present through his messages, like in the scene when a note circles from one partisan to another in dead silence and then the camera films the sentence: "Prozor must fall tonight. Tito." The strength of Tito's authority stimulated partisans to execute even the impossible missions without any objections, transforming his physical absence into the voice of the invisible divinity. According to sociologist Todor Kuljić, socialist Yugoslavia had a rationalist ideology but many parts of the population viewed Tito as a "surrogate of God."[118] Bulajić also assigns similar religious attributes to Tito: "Through the main characters and those of the common people I tried to show thoughts, concern, emotions and the spirit of Tito."[119]

In addition to their devotion to Tito, partisans in Bulajić's film are organically connected with the earth, i.e. land:

> Partisan film … re-configured the notion of homeland and of national territory from Slovenia to Macedonia by exploiting the motives of *partisan ground level movement* and of partisan *strategic edge of terrain knowledge*. The 'telluric' ideas presented in partisan films – such as originating locally from the country, defending one's own homes from out of the underground and staying in touch with the earth – were gradually expended and adjusted to a bigger home unit named 'Jugoslavija,' thus establishing an imagined common space.[120]

Many partisans were either literally defending their homes, or they stood up for the whole Yugoslavia as their home. Therefore they knew the terrain much better and used that knowledge as an advantage to hide and manoeuvre in the mountainous region. "In marching as well as touching and rather feeling one's way through the grounds, the new territory of Yugoslavia … was – in a metaphorical sense – topographically mapped and thus

[118] Todor Kuljić, *Tito* (Belgrade: Institut za politicke studije, 1998), 292.
[119] Interview with Veljko Bulajić, *Dnevnik*, Novi Sad, November 26, 1969.
[120] Miranda Jakiša, "Down to Earth Partisans: Fashioning of YU-Space in Partisan Film," *KINO!* 10 (2010): 55.

appropriated."[121] Unlike partisans in China or USSR who just participated in military operations, the Yugoslav partisan became an identity category in film: in addition to protection of the population, the existence on the territory they controlled was a political commitment. When for security reasons they retreated to inaccessible terrain, partisans never forgot that wherever they were, freedom followed.[122]

It would not be an overstatement to say that by using pyrotechnical effects Bulajić managed to create the impression of drilling and "wounding" the land which partisans, as in some sort of a religious fascination, were not willing to surrender. This almost pantheistic relation of partisans towards the land is also visible in one of the most famous stories about the filming of *Neretva* - the demolition of the bridge on this river. According to historical data, during the real battle in WWII partisans found themselves in an almost hopeless situation where the only possible direction of retreat was over the bridge on Neretva river. Knowing the Germans were waiting on the other side, Tito conceived a cunning plan and blew up the bridge. The Germans were so surprised by Tito's move that they failed to notice that the following night the partisans set up a temporary bridge and crossed the river to safety. After the war the bridge was rebuilt, only to be demolished once again during the filming of *Neretva*, though Bulajić promised to rebuild the bridge with the film's revenues.[123] The promise was never kept, quite possibly because the film did not make enough money to cover all expenses. Ever since the second demolishing, the bridge on Neretva became a unique *lieu de mémoire*[124] visited by many tourists as a site of memory of WWII,[125] although

[121] Jakiša, "Down to Earth Partisans," 59.

[122] Symbolism of the free space - no matter how relatively small it was – is established in the partisan mythology with the phenomenon of the short-lived Užička republika (Republic of Užice), one of the rare European territories not controlled by the fascists in 1941.

[123] Turajlić, *Cinema Komunisto*, documentary.

[124] *Lieu de mémoire* is a site of memory, "a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists." According to: Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7.

[125] Turajlić, *Cinema Komunisto*, documentary.

funnily enough, the bridge was destroyed during the film shooting and not the war. The temporary bridge, which partisans crossed overnight, was a part of a stunning end of the film with a strong religious-mythological subtext. In a long sequence shot, a seemingly endless line of partisans and wounded crosses the bridge from a steep riverbank onto a sunny grassy glade. Followed by expressive music this scene resembles Moses' crossing of the Red Sea with his fellowmen, especially because both partisans and Jews faced extinction.

The story about the bridge shows a yet unrecognized tendency of Bulajić's spectacle - the reconstruction of war. Namely, for the purpose of the shooting Bulajić also destroyed 4 villages, 1 castle, as well as tens of trucks and tanks; and by an unfortunate accident during the shooting of a bombing scene one cameraman died – in short, Bulajić did not just film the movie, he also revived the war. *The Battle of Neretva* is, actually, a hypertrophied version of spectacles like *The Storming of the Winter Palace* in which the act of performance is practically equal to a reconstruction of history.

I would argue that by re-playing the battle, Bulajić symbolically "reminded" younger Yugoslav generations of the importance of WWII for the creation of their state. The director himself stated that 70% of cinema spectators of *Neretva* in Yugoslav official release were younger than 40.[126] Many pupils, students and soldiers went to watch the film in organized groups,[127] thus cinemas served as some kind of temples in which the youth without any war memories watched Bulajić's motion pictures as icons of political religion. The reasons for which neither *Neretva*, nor other Yugoslav war spectacles shaped the faith in historical importance of WWII in the way American, or even Soviet war films did, could be categorized in two groups, ideological and political. Yugoslav spectacles simply lacked the sensitivity for the negative aspect of the partisan movement which consequently simplified their outlook. As time went by, and other (nationalist and economic) problems caught the

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[126] Interview with Bulajić, *Nedeljne novosti*, Belgrade, January 25, 1970.
[127] Zvijer, "Ideologija i vrednosti u jugoslovenskom ratnom spektaklu," 36.

attention of Yugoslav politicians, their interest for instrumentalization of the war spectacles dwindled more and more. Was it because these films did not attract enough viewers?

3.5. The Biggest, not the Best: Reception of *The Battle of Neretva*

Given that *The Battle of Neretva* received support from various levels of the government, at first the film was welcomed with appraisals caused by the size of the project itself. The main guest at the premiere held in Sarajevo, on a national holiday, Statehood Day (November 29, 1969), was Tito himself who after watching the film stated: "Comrade Bulajić performed this task remarkably and I can say that he accomplished everything that we expected of him."[128] After the film entered cinemas Bulajić tried to achieve bigger viewership by intensifying film's promotion.

Slightly unexpectedly, the first sharp critique came from a film critic of a leading daily newspaper *Politika*, Milutin Čolić. He invested a lot of effort to find good elements in *Neretva* and concluded that the viewers got a "film of a grand outer format, but not quite suitable manner and mentality and a film of a lower internal significance."[129] Bogdan Tirnanić first reprimanded Bulajić for saying that Živojin Pavlović's films could have been filmed by Dimitrije Ljotić,[130] and then completely deconstructed *Neretva*, defining the pilling up of action content at the expense of quality of the story as its main problem.[131] Mira Boglić, a critic from Zagreb was also harsh noticing a "lack of logical connections"[132] and numerous unexplained important historical details such as the reason for blowing up the Neretva bridge. Soon after it was clear that wishes for *Neretva* being the most popular film in

[128] Ranko Munitić, *Adio jugo-film!* (Belgrade: Centar film, Srpski kulturni klub; Kragujevac: Prizma, 2005), 113.
[129] Milutin Čolić, "Bitka na Neretvi," *Politika*, 1969, in: Milutin Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film*, 253.
[130] Tirnanić, "Psihologija i filozofija pirotehnickog pogleda," 74.
[131] Tirnanić, "Psihologija i filozofija pirotehnickog pogleda," 77.
[132] Mira Boglić, "Neretva kao legenda i ziva slika" ["Neretva as a Legend and Live Picture"], *Filmska kultura* 17 (1970), 22.

Yugoslav history would not come true. As an illustration, according to box office reports from Serbia in 1969 only 276,290 viewers saw the film, 100,000 less than the most popular Yugoslav film that year.[133]

The expectations of a great success on the international market did not pan out and that invited a lot of unpleasant questions for Bulajić about the film budget. This issue ignited a scandal related to a TV discussion *Big (expensive) projects in Yugoslav cinematography* which was filmed and then banned in Zagreb in 1975, 6 years after the premiere of *Neretva*. The speakers indirectly called out Bulajić in a group of directors who were making expensive films based on undeveloped scenarios.[134] There are indications that due to the reckless spending in *Neretva* Bulajić did not get a chance to direct the next partisan spectacle *Sutjeska,* which was made by his first assistant from *Neretva.*[135]

Yet, it cannot be said that *Neretva* did not help the international affirmation of Yugoslavia. The film was exported to 80 countries and it popularized partisan accomplishments. *Neretva* almost won the Academy Award for the best foreign picture, losing it to a Greek film *Z*. Actor Ljubisa Samardžić thinks that *Neretva* did not get the Oscar only because the film came from a relatively small communist country.[136] When it comes to success of the film in its own time, it seems that critics had no mercy with Bulajić because of his pretentiousness and the expensiveness of the project. It is interesting though, that the state did not prevent the demystification of *Neretva*, allowing the debate about the limits and purpose of a state project. In the end, in spite of the obvious flaws *The Battle of Neretva* became an important cultural artefact of Tito's Yugoslavia, certainly the one that shaped the perception of the partisan movement in the following decades.

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[133] *Kinematografija u Srbiji u 1969* [*Cinematography in Serbia in 1969*], (Belgrade: Institut za film, 1971), 176.
[134] Ranko Munitić, *Te slatke filmske laze…*[*Those Sweet Film Lies…*], (Belgrade: Vuk Karadžić, 1977), 210.
[135] Šakić, "Filmski svijet Veljka Bulajića," 21.
[136] Stoimenov, *Partizanski film*, documentary

4. *Zaseda (The Ambush)* by Živojin Pavlović: A Banned Film

Zaseda (*The Ambush*, 1969) was the fourth feature film directed by Živojin Pavlović and, as he himself stated, his most personal and favorite film.[137] In this chapter *The Ambush* will primarily be contextualized within the framework of Pavlović's literary texts, all more or less autobiographical or self-referential: autobiography – *Planeta filma* [*Film Planet*]; diaries *Izgnanstvo I* [*Exile I*] and *Ispljuvak pun krvi* [*A Bloodful Sputum*]; his interviews in newspapers and separate books – *Dva razgovora* [*Two Conversations*], *Jahac na lokomotivi* [*The Locomotive Rider*] and *Jezgro napetosti* [*The Nucleus of Tension*]; essays on film, politics and history – *Djavolji film* [*The Devilish Film*]; and even notes about his friends and collaborators – *Belina sutra* [*The Whiteness of Tomorrow*].

I plan to use all these written sources in order to establish the proportion in which Pavlović's life story and artistic views were built in *The Ambush*. Given that this movie is a work of fiction, any claim that the director's biography is completely copied into it would be ill-judged. Instead, using other sources which can not be considered autobiographical, I will try to show reflections of Pavlović's experience on the form and the content of *The Ambush*. For instance, the director intentionally shot the whole film in a place where he saw the consequences of establishing the communist rule and that he applied a different directing style than his first idol, Sergey Eisenstein, in order to symbolically break up with the former illusions, etc. My aim is to show that *The Ambush* presents a highly personalized perspective on the war and revolution with which Pavlović showed the necessity of the dissent in a society that constructed its own mythology of World War II. In a state founded on ideology of "brotherhood and unity" one of the biggest heresies was the debunking of the animal side of every human being in a war fought for the ideals of liberty and equality. Živojin Pavlović

[137] Živojin Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti* [*The Nucleus of Tension*] (Belgrade: BIGZ, Srpska knjizevna zadruga, Narodna knjiga, 1990), 90.

was not afraid to stake his own creative destiny to openly project his *subjective experience* of history.

4.1. New Man for the New Film

Živojin Pavlović was born in 1933. During World War II he stayed in a small Serbian town, Jagodina, where he witnessed the cruel conflict between the partisans and the chetniks,[138] but soon after he moved to rural eastern Serbia where he placed the story of *The Ambush*. As someone who fell in love with the everyday life in the village, the violent collectivization and Informbiro period were left engraved in Pavlović's memory as a young boy.[139] During the first years after the war, as a member of SKOJ,[140] he was fascinated with the USSR and Sergey Eisenstein's films, but after the Hungarian revolution of 1956 his faith in communist politics was seriously shaken.[141]

In 1957 Pavlović's conflict with LCY[142] peaks, when the teaching council and party committee of the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade concluded that Pavlović could not become a member of the University council due to his endorsement of "legalizing anarchic, destructive and individualistic painting."[143] Though he was a candidate for a political position, Pavlović claimed he was not disappointed; moreover, he appeared to be glad about the fact that he was finished with the Party which turned into a "social monster."[144] He

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[138] Interview with Pavlović, *NIN*, Belgrade, October 29, 1993, 41.
[139] Interview with Pavlović, *Duga*, Belgrade, June, 11th,1988, 15.
[140] SKOJ, or Savez komunisticke omladine Jugoslavije (Young Communist League of Yugoslavia) was the youth wing of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.
[141] Interview with Pavlović, *Duga*, Belgrade, June 11th, 1988, 15.
[142] LCY stands for the League of Communists of Yugoslavia was the official name of the Yugoslav communist party after 1952. Before this year it was called Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Colloquially, the League was still called Party.
[143] Živojin Pavlović, *Izgnanstvo I: 1957, 1958, 1959* [*Exile I*], (Novi Sad: Prometej; Belgrade: Kwit podium, 1999), 290.
[144] Pavlović, *Izgnanstvo* I, 291.

graduated in painting but has never become a professional painter, since he got more attracted to film and literature.[145]

By the end of the 1950s Pavlović became a member of the amateur Film Club Belgrade, the cradle of young directors willing to experiment and criticize society. Apart from filming short movies and passionate watching of films screened in the Yugoslav Film Archive, Pavlović published film critiques and essays, particularly for the magazine *Danas* (*Today*). In this magazine he exchanges opinions with young filmmakers, such as Dušan Makavejev, Aleksandar Petrović, Branko Vučićević. Already in his critiques Pavlović looks for an alternative to the mainstream Yugoslav partisan films of the 1950s and finds the model in Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal*, praising it for depicting war as a *brutal* event.[146] What Pavlović admires most is Wajda's ability to make a film composed of the "unpleasant images" that reach its climax in the absurd death of the Warsaw resistance fighters who are not larger-than-life heroes, but ordinary people with their virtues and shortcomings. The Yugoslav director also recognizes the specific stylistic means his Polish colleague uses to convey the hopelessness of fragmented destinies in the war; namely, the famous long tracking shot at the beginning of the film when the voice-over suggests that each of the fighters will die soon, while their enemies are often mentioned, but rarely seen. As will be shown, Wajda's directorial solutions set the path for Pavlović's artistic exploration and, most importantly, provided him with the central concept of *destruction*.

The notion of revolution as destruction existed in Pavlović's life experience and writings well before watching *Kanal*. Besides the aforementioned memory of WWII atrocities when he was a child, the director recalls that he publicly cursed at the "enemies of the state" during the staged trials after the war, not being aware that he was witnessing

[145] Pavlović is one of the few writers who was awarded twice with the most prestigious Yugoslav literary award – NIN award for the novel of the year– in 1985 and 1992.

[146] Živojin Pavlović, "Dva surova filma" ["Two Brutal Films"], 1960-1961, in: Živojin Pavlović, *Djavolji film: eseji i razgovori* [*The Devilish Film: Essays and Interviews*] (Novi Sad: Prometej; Belgrade: Jugoslovenska kinoteka, 1996), 82-86. The second *brutal* film Pavlović also praised is *The Young and the Damned* by Luis Bunuel who was, together with Eisenstein, Pavlović's favorite director.

forceful acquisition of private property and ruthless destruction of one hierarchy.[147] These close encounters with revolution and death inspired Pavlović to contemplate potent organic metaphors. Analyzing the first Soviet films about the October revolution, he realizes that the essence of the phenomenon of the revolution is *destruction* as a consequence of the revolutionary's "organic detestation" of his own position.[148] Pavlović writes in his diary (November 1957) that revolution is "a liberation of suppressed urges. The death drive … in circumstances in which psychological tension caused by physical destruction is brought to the tipping point, surfaces as irrational ecstasy. The character of that discharge is destructive."[149] The same line of thought is present in his consideration just after the premiere of *The Ambush*: "Revolutions… are the fruit of biological necessities, and ideas that emerged alongside them are necessary narcotic attacks on human conscience so that it would be able to be conducted till the end."[150] Organic metaphors of destruction were consistently reflected in Pavlović's war films,[151] just as metaphors of decay were omnipresent in his films on contemporary themes, in which anti-heroes wander around the hovels, landfills, dirty inns, etc.

In essence, Pavlović's concept of destruction reveals irrational historical forces in the moment when the Yugoslav political elite proclaimed the victory of rationalistic projects such as industrialization, electrification, urbanization, etc. At the very foundation of the accelerated modernization of Yugoslavia after WWII, at first sight, it was a fairly natural idea that affinity to violence and auto-destruction will disappear when all the citizens of Yugoslavia get access to electricity, running water and paved roads. Therefore it is no wonder that a mechanistically oriented system, whose main program was *building* of

[147] Interview with Pavlović, *Književne novine*, Belgrade, 1988, in: Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti*, 193.
[148] Živojin Pavlović, "Film i revolucija" ["Film and Revolution"], 1957, in: Pavlović, *Djavolji film,* 93-95.
[149] Pavlović, *Izgnanstvo I*, 409.
[150] Interview with Pavlović, *Susret*, Belgrade, 1969, in: Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti,* 34.
[151] Beside *The Ambush*, other Pavlović's war films are *Hajka* [*Manhunt*] and *Nasvidenje v naslednji vojni* [*Farewell in the Next War*].

“brotherhood and unity,” had to react harshly against the artist who pointed towards the underlying dark instincts with the great potential for destroying the fragile Yugoslav utopia.

In order to create the more ambiguous perception of WWII, Živojin Pavlović first had to undermine the dominant forms of its representation in the Yugoslav film: “Those who here spoke about the war by the way of celluloid … did not scold history, they beautified it, but in a most disgusting way …Instead of art about the revolution, we have revolutionary kitsch.”[152] The director pushes away the “beautified” image of war, objecting to the concealment of warrior’s brutality. For the same reason Pavlović also attacks the affinity towards anecdotalism and “pyrotechnical exhibitions” of Veljko Bulajić, the director of *Kozara* (1962) and *Battle of Neretva* (1969).[153]

In this theoretical offensive against the older Yugoslav war films, Pavlović resembles the authors of the French *nouvelle vague*, who also started as critics and theoreticians but soon became directors. Young and energetic, they all started heavily criticizing previous generations of directors. No matter how in the Yugoslav case most of those critiques are in place, especially for technical dilettantism in the 1950s productions, it must be taken into account that it was the period when cinematography has been constituted. As far as the alleged ideological simplicity of the first partisan films, the revisionism of Pavlović’s generation has, in fact, brought about the creation of prejudices that in 1950s war films there was only a Manichean categorization of “good” partisans and “bad” Germans/chetniks/ustashas. On the contrary, numerous war films from the 1950s have, apart from very common propaganda purposes, been dealing with sensitive political issues and moral dilemmas.[154] Therefore, it can be said, and Pavlović himself confirms it, that some of the negative marks were given in the heat of the struggle to secure the first directorship of a

[152] Živojin Pavlović, “Laz o revoluciji” [The Lie About Revolution], *Danas*, no. 5, July 1961, in: Pavlović, *Djavolji film*, 148.
[153] Živojin Pavlović, “Opsene” [“Mirages”], *Danas*, no. 35, September 1962, in: Pavlović, *Djavolji film*, 156.
[154] Dimitrije Vojnov, *Snimanje posle rata* [*Production after the War*], text of a lecture on the partisan film given in Dom omladine Beograd, December 22, 2010, 2.

feature film.[155] Pavlović was fighting for his own artistic *Lebensraum* – the battle between him and directors like Veljko Bulajić had just begun.

4.2. Pavlović's Road to War (Film)

In 1961 Pavlović won the Yugoslav contest for the production of a short film with his colleagues from the Film Club Belgrade, Kokan Rakonjac and Marko Babac. This contest was organized by the federal Ministry of Culture aiming at "refreshing the cinematography with de-bureaucratization" and offering a chance to new authors.[156] Debutants joined their films into an omnibus *Kapi, vode, ratnici* (*Drops, Waters, Warriors*) and sold it to a Sarajevo production company, Sutjeska film, which afterwards made significant revenues at the box office. However, during the premiere at the Pula Film Festival this rather experimental omnibus was booed by the audience, although it received the jury award for the best debut. In general, throughout his whole career Pavlović insisted that he does not care about making crowd pleasing movies. At the same time he emphasized that almost all of his films were financially successful and that he won producers' sympathies with modest budgets and short shooting schedules.[157]

Precisely for these reasons Sutjeska film offered Pavlović, Rakonjac and Babac to film another omnibus, *Grad* (*The Town*, 1963) which became the only film in socialist Yugoslavia banned by a court order. The main cause for this ban was "unauthorized screening in one Belgrade cinema,"[158] as well as pessimism which contradicts "current status

[155] Živojin Pavlović and Nebojša Pajkić, *Jahac na lokomotivi* [*The Locomotive Rider*] (Belgrade: Studentski kulturni centar, 2001), 56.
[156] Pavlović, *Jahac na lokomotivi*, 48.
[157] Interview with Pavlović, *Vjesnik*, Zagreb, January 28, 1986, 19.
[158] Bogdan Tirnanić, *Crni talas* [*Black Wave*] (Belgrade: Filmski centar Srbije, 2008), 33.

of the society;"[159] Pavlović himself claimed in the 1980s that the cause for the ban was the internal conflict between the management and the group of workers in Sutjeska film, although film critic Bogdan Tirnanić thinks that the persecution of the creators of *The Town* was a part of a wide political campaign inspired by one of Tito's speeches in 1963, in which he rather vaguely criticized "futile intellectuals" for their pessimism.[160]

While shooting his story for *The Town*, Pavlović got the approval from the state-owned Avala film studio for filming of his first independently directed feature film, *Povratak* (*The Return*). In 1962 Ratko Dražević, a Yugoslav spy in the United States and a major in Tito's secret service – OZNA, was appointed as the head manager of Avala film.[161] Dražević completely changed the profile of an unproductive company and started ambitious international co-productions which turned this studio into a small Hollywood, attracting famous directors like Orson Welles and Nicholas Ray. In the manner of Roger Corman, Dražević gave a chance to the beginners, most notably to Aleksandar Petrović who will make *Skupljači perja* (*I Even Met Happy Gypsies*), the first Yugoslav film to be awarded in Cannes (1967).

One of the novelties Dražević introduced in Avala film was an artistic council that had already existed in smaller companies. Avala film's artistic council was in charge of approving screenplays for filming, but also served as a discrete internal censorship body. Members of this artistic council, amongst others, were some renowned writers, and later soft dissidents: Borislav Mihailović-Mihiz, Dobrica Ćosić, Slobodan Selenic and Antonije Isaković;[162] with Dražević's support, Pavlović films *The Return*, a pessimistic story about an

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[159] Tirnanić, *Crni talas*, 39.
[160] Tirnanić, *Crni talas*, 34.
[161] Živojin Pavlović, *Belina sutra* [*The Whiteness of Tomorrow*] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1983), 346.
[162] Although Pavlović kept professional contacts with these writers and shared some political views with Mihiz, he never belonged to their intellectual circle. Both Pavlović and the dissidents' informal leader, Ćosić, attacked Tito's regime for letting down the ideals on which Yugoslavia was based and disrespecting of human and intellectual freedom. At first, Ćosić discarded the provincialism of linguistic disputes between Serbs and Croats, but after 1966 he became more and more vocal in expressing Serbian nationalism. Unlike Ćosić, Pavlović

ex-con who gets rejected by society without a chance for rehabilitation. However, unexpected for the director, after the test screening Dražević and the artistic council placed the film on shelf until 1966 for its "non-realistic depicting of the socialist reality."[163]

While discouraged by this turn of events, Pavlović was by no means defeated. Always offering different screenplays to producers all over Yugoslavia, he made a wise move by going to a smaller production company, FRZ Beograd, that produced his next two films *Budjenje pacova* (*The Rats Woke Up*, 1967) and *Kad budem mrtav i beo* (*When I Am Dead and White*, 1968). Fearing that Pavlović's pessimist views will again be frowned upon in Yugoslavia, his liberal, but cautious producer, Dušan Perković, offered these films first to international festivals. This turned out to be an excellent solution, because Pavlović's films won awards in Karlovy Vary and Berlin, thus becoming respected back home.[164] At that moment Pavlović could choose the topic of his next film, without any rigid supervision of an artistic council like in Avala film; in fact, Perković advised Pavlovića that the end of his first war film *The Ambush* should be tragic.[165] Using the positive reputation around his name, Pavlović started the filming of *The Ambush* under the umbrella of FRZ Beograd only three months after student demonstrations in 1968 ended.

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remained opposed to nationalism, as can be seen in *The Ambush*. Ćosić's circle is extensively analyzed in the book: Nick Miller, *The Nonconformists: Culture, Politics and Nationalism in a Serbian Intellectual Circle, 1944-1991* (New York: Central European University Press, 2007).

[163] Pavlović, *Djavolji film*, 205.

[164] Živojin Pavlović, *Planeta filma* [*Film Planet*] (Belgrade: Zepter Book World, 2002), 71-72; Nebojša Pajkić, Nenad Polimac, Slobodan Šijan (ed.), *Dva razgovora* [*Two Conversations*] (Belgrade: Studentski kulturni centar, 1985), 28.

[165] Pavlović, *Planeta filma*, 86.

4.3. Echo of 1968 Student Protests

The seven-day student protests at Belgrade University in June 1968 revealed the depth of the Yugoslav socioeconomic crisis. Initially, students protested because of their poor living standards, but then they demanded a decrease of the unemployment rate and return to the ideals of social justice. Pavlović was an active participant of these events and left a written testimony in the banned diary *A Bloodful Sputum*. When the director saw the scale of the protest, together with Borislav Mihailović Mihiz he initiated sending a solidarity message to the students. Signed by almost 50 intellectuals, the message was read in public as early as on the 4th of June, i.e. the second day of the protest:

TO STUDENTS OF BELGRADE UNIVESITY

With a great interest, excitement and appreciation we are following your struggle which became the question in the consciousness of every honest man or woman in this country. With all our hearts and minds we support your courage to set not just your narrow university demands, but also to open and refresh all the important questions of freedom, truth and justice in a socialist society.[166]

Soon, dynamic debates took place in Belgrade University Rectorate, mostly about the way in which Yugoslav society should be organized. Numerous intellectuals, including Pavlović, publicly addressed the Student Assembly. Pavlović's statement from the 6th of June in which he warned that "changes can not be expected from the leaders of the League of Communists, simply because it is not in their interest,"[167] caused discontent among some of the gathered students who did not share Pavlović's radical views and doubt that the ruling *nomenklatura* can transform itself. Furthermore, it is possible that these students could not have seen a viable political alternative, especially when a number of officials fulfilled some of their demands. No less important role played the fact that students failed to define the

[166] Živojin Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi* [*A Bloodful Sputum*] (Belgrade: Graficki atelje Dereta, 1990), 63.
[167] Pavlović, *Ispljuvak pun krvi*, 121.

terms under which the protest should cease.[168] Finally, the suspense eased after Tito's famous speech on the 9th of June in which the Yugoslav president agreed in general terms with the students who "took [Tito's speech] as a sign of support to their ideas" and peacefully disbanded the protest.[169]

This epilogue left Pavlović reassured in his opinion that Yugoslav society was still incapable of any substantial change. Yet, already in 1969 he noticed a few valuable characteristics of the 1968 protests:

> It is my opinion that they – although in material context left no results, and suffered a romantic defeat, a terrible defeat – are of the utmost importance. I think that they could be compared with the event of 1948. … On the other side, it is important that within that youth an *emotional opposition* [italics added] was formed and is forming even now as we speak.[170]

Reference to 1948, that is, the split between Stalinists and Titoists, obviously resonated in Pavlović's perspective as the last moment of social dialectics in Yugoslavia before 1968. Even though 20 years had passed from the creation of Goli otok prison camp for Yugoslav citizens who were accused of supporting Stalin, this historical point remained a taboo for contemporary public discourse of that time. One of the reasons why Pavlović started comparing 1948 and 1968 was the letter written by an ex-prisoner of Goli otok, Nikola Čučković, who sent it to Belgrade students in order to expose the brutal torture of his inmates. The director was so impressed by the insider's perspective that he included the whole of Čučković's letter in *A Bloodful Sputum*, albeit without any commentary. In a society which systematically kept secret the traumatic testimony of Goli otok prisoners, among whom were many distinguished partisans, Pavlović recognized the significance of Čučković's suppressed, unofficial and, most importantly, *personal* history. For this reason it

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[168] Nebojša Popov, *Drustveni sukobi – Izazov sociologiji: Beogradski jun 1968.* [*Social Conflicts – Challenge to Sociology: Belgrade June 1968*] (Belgrade: Službeni glasnik, 2008), 93-99.
[169] Popov, *Drustveni sukobi*, 102.
[170] Interview with Pavlović, *Susret*, Belgrade, 1969, in: Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti*, 39-40.

comes as no surprise that the first title of his diary about 1968 was *Subjective History of a Defeat*.[171]

Excluding the ideas of student protests in 1968, *The Ambush* resonates with the critical ideas of Yugoslav Marxist philosophers as gathered around the journal, *Praxis*. Pavlović did not leave a trace of his own perception of the ideas of these philosophers and he was certainly not advocating transparent political propaganda; thus for his films it cannot be said that they were a "bait for constructive critical action on the part of the masses to challenge the apparatchiks."[172] However, since Pavlović socialized with the leaders of the student protests and his colleague Makavejev - all were, in fact, obviously under the influence of Praxis philosophers - it can be said that *The Ambush* shares some notions with this school of thought. First and foremost, it is a "merciless criticism of everything existing," which was a famous platitude of young Marx adopted by Yugoslav philosophers in the 1960s. In addition, Praxis criticism was a "criticism of the Yugoslav Stalinism *par excellence*."[173] Pavlović also debunked Stalinist methods of ruling employed by Yugoslav communists, which I will describe in further detail in the analysis of the film itself. The next important Praxis terms are dehumanization and alienation, i.e. "internal repression which is not subjected only to arrest and brutal treatment of the system towards the human, but that also suffocates human potentials."[174] Protagonists of *The Ambush* act alienated from the revolution that they served not so long ago; after the victory Vrana is unsure why he fought during the war, while Zeka tries to satisfy his own selfish needs. Finally, Praxis philosophers proposed that the basic political notions shoud not be society and state, but a working individual, leading to a form of "personalism."[175] The paradigm of personalism is present in

[171] Interview with Pavlović, *Susret*, Belgrade, 1969, in: Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti*, 39-40.
[172] Greg DeCuir, Jr., "Black Wave Polemics: Rhetoric as Aesthetic," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 1(2010): 89.
[173] Zagorka Golubović, in: Popov, *Sloboda i nasilje*, 37.
[174] Zagorka Golubović, in: Popov, *Sloboda i nasilje*, 45.
[175] Zagorka Golubović, in: Popov, *Sloboda i nasilje*, 48.

Pavlović's insistence on a subjective view of historical events, as well as in his outlining of the tragedy of an individual who does not want to accept ideological deception.

When Pavlović started shooting *The Ambush* he was 35-year-old, still young and "promising" director with one banned and one temporarily shelved film. These obstacles did not make him ready for any compromise, especially after the success of his previous two films. Not inclined to bend his views for any reason or anyone's taste, Pavlović was quite sure that after the end of protest Tito's administration will not undertake all the necessary social and cultural reforms.

Despite the fact that Pavlović received international awards, maneuvering space for his social criticism was shrinking year after year. The demand for financial success brought increase of production of unproblematic films, mainly populist comedies, while the state and Tito himself supported the ultra-expensive spectacle *The Battle of Neretva*. Pavlović's producer, Perković, remarked in 1969, when he was at the top of his success, that "the production in Serbia for the last 3 years was higher than the available resources could have allowed. We, filmmakers, see the exit from this unfavorable situation in expanding our operations to distribution of domestic and foreign films and that is why we formed our own distribution."[176] Perković admitted that the revenue from cinema tickets was not enough to keep the company afloat, which explains why Pavlović invested himself so much in *The Ambush* – he could not even assume when the next time was going to be when he would have so much artistic freedom. *The Ambush* was the first film that he directed after his own script; he openly admitted that he identified with the protagonist, Vrana.[177] His perspective on the war was as subjective and extreme as it can be, so the clash with the official version of history was inevitable.

[176] *Dijalog sa producentima* [*Dialogue with the Producers*], *Sineast* 10 (1969): 43.
[177] Pavlović, *Dva razgovora*, 34.

4.4. Camera as a Weapon

Pavlović's screenplay for *The Ambush* was based on the motives of two short stories: *Po treći put* [*For the Third Time*][178] by Antonije Isaković, who was already mentioned as a member of the artistic council in Avala film during the 1960s, and *Legenda* [*The Legend*][179] by Pavlović himself. The film story takes place in Knjaževac (a small town in eastern Serbia where Pavlović lived as a teenager) during the last couple of days of war when the victory of the partisans was no longer questioned. Choosing location and period outside of the spatial and temporal realm of the battle front is frequent in war films which do not treat war as a spectacle. Two examples of this type of war film are 1967 Yugoslav film *Jutro* [*Morning*], directed by Puriša Djordjević, which actually takes place in the first days of peace; and the Soviet film *The Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) about a soldier's home leave to help his mother. Both films, as well as Pavlović's, depict the moral dilemmas of the fighters in peace and deprive them of their heroic pathos.

The main character in *The Ambush* is 19-year old Ive Vrana,[180] played by the Croatian actor, Ivica Vidović, appreciated by Pavlović for his "unspoiled actors' spontaneous act" so much that he changed the protagonist's nationality from Serbian to Croatian.[181] After his parents are slaughtered by Italians, Vrana moves to Serbia, staying at his cousin's house. In 1945 he joins OZNA, the newly founded security service which was, among other things, in charge of eliminating chetniks. He is soon disillusioned by seeing the obnoxious partisan commander, Zeka, looting, raping and eventually dying after defeating the chetniks. Zeka's achievements get taken over by a bureaucrat Jotic. At the village exit, a group of peasants execute Vrana because he does not have personal documents.

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[178] Antonije Isaković, *Velika deca* [*Big Children*] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1958).
[179] Živojin Pavlović, *Krivudava reka* [*Meandering River*] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1963).
[180] "Vrana" means "crow". This nickname refers to the Serbian idiom "white crow", which is an equivalent for the English "black sheep."
[181] Pavlović, *Planeta filma*, 87.

Vrana represents an alien – starting with his Croatian accent in Eastern Serbia. His dialect sounds softer and thereby more effeminate when compared to the one of Serbian peasants. In this respect Pavlović's coming back to historical roots of the multinational state building reinforces the instability of its construction and the differences between the nations. When asked to define Vrana's inner conflict, Pavlović responded: "Ive Vrana tries to harmonize the ideology with life and in that attempt he suffers a terrible defeat."[182] He has to put up with his friends' mockery inspired by his relationship with Milica, the daughter of a lawyer and a bourgeois who was stripped of his civil rights.[183] Although they look like happy lovers, Vrana and Milica talk only about violence. Milica and Vrana kiss for the first time at a local cemetery, when he, despite knowing her origin, gives her a necklace with a five-pointed star. Depersonalization of this act is obvious in giving the ideological symbol to a loved one rather than a locket with a picture inside. Being a passionate communist, Vrana is a man with no property, and he is opposed to pillaging food from farmers in order to supply the Syrmian front.[184] This is a strong reference to the privileges acquired by the Yugoslav *nomenklatura* – so-called "red bourgeoisie" - that led to social segregation and the student protests in 1968.[185]

Vrana's opposite from head to toe is Zeka, a cruel womanizer and a drunkard, experienced in guerilla fighting. Even if Zeka had some political illusions, he abandoned them and began to satisfy only his selfish interests. The director is careful not to let Zeka become a one-dimensional villain, so this character acts like a father figure to Vrana.[186]

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[182] Aleksandar Novaković, *Zaseda* [*The Ambush*], accessed December 8, 2011, http://novikadrovi.net/kritike/56-kritika.php

[183] Scene of the trial to Milica's father is obviously relying on similar trials witnessed by young Pavlović himself.

[184] Situated in Vojvodina, this was the last great WWII front where coalition of Red Army and Yugoslav partisans fought against Germans. Many young and inexperienced partisans died on this front, and it was not a pleasant memory of the war.

[185] For a list of students' slogans against the "red bourgeoisie", see: Popov, *Drustveni konflikti*, 96-97.

[186] Pavlović, *Dva razgovora*, 24.

When he dies fighting against chetniks, all of his glory is stolen by his antipode, police officer Jotic.

Jotic is a typical ambitious careerist and a coward who forgets a wounded brother-in-arms. It is around him that unrecorded examples, at least not on a celluloid tape, of Yugoslav revolutionary violence occur. Without a trial Jotic kills railroad workers whom he accused of theft; the property of Milica's family gets confiscated, party headquarters gets torched, communist officials kill three peasants, etc. Consequently, it can be said that Jotic performs the deformation of the revolutionary ideals. According to Pavlović,

> The tragedy of the revolution does not happen in the process of revolution of history or time, but during the time of consolidation of recently gained power, that is to say when the revolutionary … devolves to a bureaucrat. In that devolution he transforms, as Camus said in his masterpiece *The Rebel,* from a heretic and a rebel to a policeman. After that, a bureaucrat protects taboos which he produced during his devolution.[187]

In other words, the bureaucrat protects the silence surrounding the revolutionary violence that he took part in. The causes of revolutionary violence in *The Ambush* are often banal, whereas death looks absurd, especially Vrana's. There is no higher, teleological sense behind the partisans' death, while normal life goes on, with weddings, love walks and celebration of Jotic's nonexistent courage. Life does not follow the logic of the official, exclusively tragic history.

The Ambush opposes not only the official version of the past, but also the model of previous partisan films. In Pavlović's film there are no Germans, that archetypical enemy of the partisans. Nominal enemies are the chetniks who were portrayed in all possible ways except as a decent and dangerous rival. More importantly, rivalry between the partisans and chetniks infers that WWII was not a liberation, but a *civil* war. By emphasizing the ruthless requsition of food from the peasants Pavlović goes even further and turns communist revolution into a class war. As opposed to partisan spectacles in which peasants, workers and

[187] Interview with Pavlović, *Nedjelja*, Sarajevo, December 17, 1989, 20.

other classes are allies,[188] in *The Ambush* the state kills the peasants without trial. During the film peasants are often cursed as well as the peasants' revolution. Even Vrana's last words are the curse of a peasant's mother, preceded by the line directed to the peasants preparing to kill him: "Some revolution you are!" Commenting on his film's portrayal of the peasants, Pavlović notes:

> Only when revolutions were done by peasants everything turned out the way it should have: Russian, Chinese, ours and Cuban. However, the leaders of these revolutions were never peasants. They were usually originating from the middle class. The reasons which inspired peasants to go to fight were never identical with the reasons of the people who initiated it. Peasantry is something that goes on, tumbling like an amoeba, devouring and yet forced to be part of the revolution. Only genius people like Mao Zedong and Tito managed the peasantry with due caution. While fanatics, unlike them, always despised peasants.[189]

Yet, a question remains: if Vrana is not one of the fanatics despising peasants, but an idealist who honestly fought for their freedom, why did those peasants kill him in the end, without properly checking his identity? Pavlović said peasants did so because of their own "biological conformism" due to which they are not ready to risk losing Vrana from their hands.[190] This biological conformism may stand for the destructive irrationalism the director pursued in depicting the revolution. Vrana's absurd death indicates that the war did not bring the final victory, but only the silence before the new bloodshed, thus fully transposing Pavlović's notion of a *people* as a "speculative abstraction" which is characterized by "a constant of distorted atavisms."[191]

The cult of death and violence reaches negative apotheosis in the last scene of the film when during the parade alongside the cheerful youth crippled war veterans are walking, complying with the statement that Yugoslavia is the third country in Europe when casualties are measured in World War II. The main characters can not escape large and eye-piercing

[188] Nemanja Zvijer, *Ideologija filmske slike*, 117.
[189] Živojin Pavlović, *Dva razgovora* [*Two Conversations*] (edited by Nebojša Pajkić, Nenad Polimac i Slobodan Šijan), (Beograd: Studentski kulturni centar, 1985), 38.
[190] Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti*, 63.
[191] Pavlović, *Izgnanstvo I*, 531.

portraits of Tito, Aleksandar Ranković and other Yugoslav leaders. Two images stand out: the one of Vrana's girlfriend Milica standing like a monument of communist victory on the truck passing by the officials, and the very last shot of the film, Stalin's portrait as the reminder of the tragic 1948 and the fact that some of Tito's political principles were similar to Stalin's.

A few words need to be said about Pavlović's directing style as it is yet another example of how he produced an alternative vision of the war. *The Ambush*, just like his previous films, was shot in black-and-white which in 1969 was still used in Yugoslav cinematography, though much less than in the 1950s. The monochromy invoked a grimmer image of the war, avoiding the optimistic use of color in films like *Captain Leshi*. The whole film was shot in only 16 days[192] mostly due to the subtly orchestrated sequence shots with the basic action in forefront and dynamic actions in the back.[193] This filming style was different from the mainstream partisan films characterized by shorter shots. Though Pavlović does not insist on one important aspect of the sequence shots, it should be emphasized that with this way of filming it prevents severe manipulation of the material in the editing room, so the director has more control over the realization of his ideas.

In his essay *Nisani!* [*Aim!*], written in 1961, Pavlović in a poetic manner writes about the necessity of shooting documentaries in which people will not know that they are filmed. In order to register the authenticity of human life, the director instructs his colleagues with the following imperative: "Stealthily, like a sniper, let the film artist aim the lens at life's navel; let barrages of celluloid drill the body from all sides; once again, on the screen it will be resurrected in its unadulterated splendor."[194] These observations can be applied to a feature film as well, in the sense that in *The Ambush* camera is used as a symbolical weapon

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[192] Pavlović, *Dva razgovora*, 38.

[193] Hungarian director Miklos Jancso used the similar shooting style and storyline in his film *Igy jottem* [*My Way Home*] (1964), though Pavlović claims that he watched it only after *The Ambush* was finished: Pavlović, *Jahac na lokomotivi*, 109.

[194] Živojin Pavlović, *Nisani!*, 1961, in: Ranko Munitić et al., *Živojin Pavlović* (Belgrade: Centar film, RTS; Kragujevac: Prizma; Thessaloniki: 38th International Thessaloniki Film Festival, 1997), 185.

that "fires" at perpetrators of crimes in the name of the revolution. Metaphorically speaking, the shots Pavlović fired from his camera were not blank bullets and they have caused a strong echo among critics.

4.5. The Director in the Ambush

In one of the previous sub-chapters I have singled out the liberal producer of *The Ambush*, Dušan Perković, as the key factor for realization of the film. In many ways a larger dilemma is how it was shown in the first place, that is to say, how the censorship did not stop it before its premiere. Reviewed documentation of the Federal Committee for Review of Films held no clue about the ban or the censorship of *The Ambush*, which does not mean that such a directive did not exist since the archival material might not be complete. However, it is more probable that the film was registered for Pula festival in July of 1969 without consent of the censors. Pula festival did not have any selection, that is, all Yugoslav films completed between the two festivals would have been screened. At the same time, a new film by the director that won the award in the previous year was screened at the opening of a new festival. Pavlović claims that Petar Volk, director of the festival, "cunningly devised a plan not to screen *The Ambush* in the Arena but in a smaller hall," probably due to the dichotomy of viewers' opinion after the first test screening before the start of the festival.[195] In that way the problematic film was formally screened, but only a small number of viewers saw it, so at that moment its resonance was less significant. Pavlović's producer managed to get *The Ambush* on the screening list for the Venice festival where it got many appraisals from the Italian leftist press. However, that year Venice festival did not award any film, so in 1995

[195] Pavlović, *Jahac na lokomotivi*, 112-113.

Pavlović expressed his belief that criticism of *The Ambush* was "facilitated" by the unfortunate case that the film did not win any important award abroad.[196]

Before shifting to political offensive against the Black Wave and *The Ambush*, I will briefly reconstruct the shelving of the film. The public prosecutor demanded to see the film, but surprisingly did not issue a ban with a paradox explanation: "*The Ambush* is an anti-communist film, but also an art piece of a high quality."[197] Pavlović adds that at the screening for the prosecutor there was a group of marginal politicians impressed by the film. When asked what they thought about the film, politicians replied: "This is a perfect work of art, we will not intervene here, but do not screen it."[198] The film was never officially banned, but the producer obeyed "instruction" of the prosecutor and the politicians. *The Ambush* was collecting dust in a warehouse for the next two full decades, only to be screened publicly in 1990.

Truth to be told, prior to this ban *The Ambush* was screened in Knjaževac where it was shot, as well as in Ljubljana, where it got positive reactions from the audience.[199] Most of the critics, who wrote about the film, watched it at the closed screening at Pula Film Festival. A limited release of *The Ambush* fit perfectly in the tactics of the authorities which usually did not ban a provocative film, but instead would issue a permit to screen it in a few smaller cinemas, so that only after a week or two a film would have been taken off the repertoire due to "lack of viewers." Naturally, filmmakers were financially burdened due to the fact that they were unable to cover their expenses. From this perspective it seems curious that the screening of *The Ambush* at the big Pavlović's retrospective in France in 1983 was allowed,[200] proving that some films were suitable for screening abroad but not locally and vice versa. *The Ambush* was probably problematic even after Tito's death because of its

[196] Milan Nikodijević, *Zabranjeni bez zabrane: zona sumraka jugoslovenskog filma* [*Banned Without Ban: The Twilight Zone of the Yugoslav Film*] (Belgrade: Jugoslovenska kinoteka, 1995), 22.
[197] Pavlović, *Planeta filma*, 100.
[198] Pavlović, *Dva razgovora*, 39.
[199] Pavlović, *Planeta filma*, 100.
[200] Pavlović, *Planeta filma*, 101.

iconoclastic attack on the fundamental myths of the post-WWII Yugoslavia. On the other hand, when screened abroad it could have looked like an indicator of great artistic freedom of Pavlović's generation, which was commendable of the Yugoslav government.

Surprisingly, even though his film was banned Pavlović continued directing and even won the first prize for *Crveno klasje* [*Red Wheat*] in Pula in 1971. This was one of four films Pavlović shot in Slovenia, where he found a safe haven there for himself even though he had a reputation as a scandal maker. He was also an exception amongst Yugoslav directors, because his adjustability allowed him to work in another Yugoslav republic. In the meantime, the media pressure on Pavlović and other Black Wave filmmakers rose constantly.

The fact that *The Ambush* was heavily criticized was closely related to the offensive against the Black Wave directors, because Pavlović was considered a member of this group. In the summer of 1969 articles introducing the term Black Wave appeared in the press. Journalist Nebojša Glišić claimed that he is the author of an unsigned text where the term was first used: "The basic characteristic of this years' film accomplishments is that they are all "black". And not in a neorealist manner that is based on reality, but some sort of black *l'art pour l'art*."[201] A much more famous text[202] was written by a journalist, Vladimir Jovičić, for *Borba*, the official gazette of the Yugoslav communist party. Jovičić started with an accusation that the problematic films were only a fashionable reaction to the political and cultural unrest in the world, and that made them commercial abroad. Jovičić's second objection is that these presented were a dogmatic reaction to socialist realism, as they reflected "a reverse Zhdanovism played in black rather than white – and both are equally false." Third, Jovičić argued that the Black Wave directors abused and augmented the political disbalance in their own country giving advantage only to to antiheroes and pessimism. In essence, Jovičić requested that shape their work according to the concept of

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[201] (Nebojša Glišić), *Efekti crnog talasa* [*Effects of the Black Wave*], *Ekonomska politika*, Belgrade, July 21, 1969.
[202] Vladimir Jovičić, *Crni talas u nasem filmu* [*The Black Wave in Our Film*], *Borba* (the supplement *Reflektor*), August 3, 1969.

"social freedom", that is to say that they start complying with some abstract collective interest in order to create a society without conflict and full of harmony.

Milutin Čolić, an influential critic of the daily *Politika* who praised previous Pavlović films, marked the plot of *The Ambush* as a "rephrased" Puriša Djordjević's *Morning*, accusing Pavlović along the way that he stole an array of scenes from the film of his colleagues. More than anything else Čolić reproaches Pavlović for pushing notions that the director supports "very explicitly, harshly and without any justification."[203] Moreover, the critic doubts the good intentions of the author who paints the revolution way too "dark and aimless," turning his art into a "political program."[204] Zagreb critic, Mira Boglić, warns that "epigonism posed a serious threat to originality" of the Yugoslav film, pointing out a recurring image of dirt, rats, drunkards and prostitutes in Pavlović's films.[205] Čolić's and Boglić's remarks are based on the opinion of Slobodan Novaković, who noted that Pavlović, along with his own artistic world also created an artistic myth: "Just by consciously and rationally speculating with his own myth, he started treating it privately and then he destroyed it."[206] Sociologist Milan Ranković recanted Pavlović's essays on revolution as surpassed "biologistic anarchism"[207] without any backing in a "*consciously built* vision of a better society."[208]

Although less conspicuous, in magazines and newspapers of that period some supporters of Pavlović's vision of revolution were also present. Nikola Stojanović suggests that the director "contributed to demythologization of the Revolution for the new generations

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[203] Milutin Čolić, "Zaseda", *Politika* (1969), in: Milutin Čolić, *Jugoslovenski ratni film. Knjiga druga* [*Yugoslav War Film. Vol. 2*] (Belgrade: Institut za film; Titovo Uzice: Vesti, 1984), 450.
[204] Milutin Čolić, "'Crni film' ili kriza 'autorskog filma'" ["'Black film', or the Crisis of 'Auteur Cinema'"], *Filmska kultura* 71 (1970): 6.
[205] Mira Boglić, "U trenutku sumnje" ["The Moment of Doubt"], *Filmska kultura* 65 (1969): 6.
[206] Slobodan Novaković, "Privatni mitovi ili smrt filmske strukture" ["Private Myths, or Death of Film Structure"], *Sineast* 5 (1968): 31-32.
[207] Milan Ranković, *Drustvena kritika u savremenom jugoslovenskom igranom filmu* [*Social Criticism in Contemporary Yugoslav Feature Film*] (Belgrade: Institut za film, 1970), 25.
[208] Ranković, *Drustvena kritika u jugoslovenskom filmu*, 26.

that have a right to know the truth in order to become more mature advocates of that same Revolution."[209] Reacting to the events of Pula festival in 1969, Nikola Lorencin lucidly notes the core of the objection used by Pavlović's critics: "Establishing facts about a work of art turned into comparison between the original and Platonic copy which… is discovered by the creators, twisting the existing hierarchy."[210] In other words, works of art (Platonic copy) are again subjected to proclaimed criteria of the "objective" history (original). Bogdan Tirnanić's ironic remark that in the newspapers day after day new research is being invented in which non-identified readers are asking only for more "cheerful" films,[211] is followed by Milorad Vučelić's observation that *The Ambush* did justice by showing a "Stalinist past" of the Yugoslav Party.[212]

As Pavlović's biggest flaw his opponents note his, so to speak, unoriginality and mannerism. They object that his artistic development sidelined him in an artistic dead-end, which is a debatable argument given that a whole group of excellent directors worked only in one genre. The critics emphasized that Pavlović's point of view should be put down to a *private* myth, so, on something not binding and not serious. Private view is not the same as *subjective*; in fact, it is inferior compared to the *ideology of the collective* which no critic is willing to pinpoint, but it goes without saying that it is the official historiography which swept the crimes of the communist government under the rug. The director was given the right to show mistakes in the revolution, but after 1968 and the first significant political turbulences it was necessary to get back on the track of all the "positive" and "cheerful" in history. The voice of those who criticized Pavlović and *The Ambush* was more vocal, because

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[209] Nikola Stojanović, "Zaseda", *Sineast* 8-9 (1969): 34.

[210] Nikola Lorencin, "Pulska pomeranja: oci nepoverenja nad domacim filmom" ["Pula Shifts: Distrustful Eyes Looking at Dometic Film"], *Sineast* 8-9 (1969): 28.

[211] Bogdan Tirnanić, "Kritika jugoslovenskog igranog filma i jugoslovenska filmska kritika: dijalog o jednoj aktuelnoj situaciji," ["The Criticism of the Yugoslav Feature Film and Yugoslav Film Critique: A Dialogue About the Current Situation"] *Sineast* 8-9 (1969): 19.

[212] Milorad Vučelić, "Cuvari nevinosti ili necista savest," [The Guardians of Innocence, or Guilty Conscience] *Student*, Belgrade, January 19, 1971.

they wrote for big newspapers (*Politika*) and film journals (*Filmska kultura*), while the director's supporters occupied place in smaller magazines and journals (*Student* and *Sineast*).

Although he had to quit as the professor of film directing in Belgrade in 1973 as a result of mounting political pressure, Pavlović refused to leave Yugoslavia like some other Black Wave directors (Petrović, Makavejev, Žilnik). In this sense he was an atypical dissident aware of the consequences his actions produced: "It should be noted that any, even remotely autonomous creation is a sign of disobedience. You have to endure the beating. Your persistence proves your point."[213] Pavlović indeed proved his persistence by not deviating from his critical stance after 1969, though he had less opportunities to direct films.

It is possible that the government was satisfied with the breaking of the Black Wave so much so that they were not interested in Pavlović's later work. Pavlović was not inclined to anarchy or romantic rebellion and it would be very hard to support the claim that *The Ambush* was one of "the honest condemnations of the essence of socialist revolution in Yugoslavia and the state it had created."[214] On the contrary, Pavlović criticized Tito's regime, remaining loyal to communism as a lofty but unattainable ideal.[215] The director wanted Yugoslav society to reconsider the founding myth of its modern history, not to disappear in its own negation.

The Ambush represents a product of the director's long term elaboration of the concept of war and revolution as ultimately destructive historical events. The director Živojin Pavlović acts as an outsider in the war film genre depriving it of its spectacular side. Instead of heroic feats he shows the end of the communist revolution in which young idealists who survived the war do not know how to survive in peace, overwhelmed by the bureaucratized

[213] Interview with Pavlović, *Književne novine*, 1988, in: Pavlović, *Jezgro napetosti*, 201.
[214] Slobodan Šijan, "The Red and the Black in Yugoslav Black Wave", in: Greg DeCuir, Jr., *Yugoslav Black Wave: Polemical Cinema from 1963-1972 in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Film Center Serbia, 2011), 6-7.
[215] Interview with Pavlović, *Oko*, Zagreb, July 12, 1990, 25.

government. In connection with the student protests in 1968, *The Ambush* reflects the failure of the last great demands for social reform in Tito's Yugoslavia.

Although faced with bans on his first films, Pavlović enjoyed certain creative freedom after winning awards at prestigious international festivals in Karlovy Vary and Berlin. However, when the number of socially critical films increased, authorities effectively suppressed them by giving them only a limited release for a short time. *The Ambush* was unofficially banned by the recommendation of the state prosecutor, and thus opened the door for the series of critical allegations charging Pavlović for mannerism and unoriginality as the easiest way to undermine his heretical vision of history.

The pessimism of *The Ambush* stemmed from Pavlović's authentic memory of the war, as well as from his reflection on the representation of the war that he responded to while intellectually maturing. His highly personalized and stylized perception underlined the crimes of the war winners by drawing attention to the images that spectacles like *Battle of Neretva* rejected. *The Ambush* and Pavlović himself did not deny the significance of the Yugoslav revolution, but they predicted that Yugoutopia would crumble under the weight of unresolved moral, ethnic and class issues arising at the end of WWII.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have used three Yugoslav war films from the 1960s to examine the cinematic perception of World War II as the key event in the creation of communist Yugoslavia. I have used films as historical sources in the context of their production, iconography and critical reception simultaneously analyzing the role of censorship in two out of the aforementioned three films. A core issue of my research has also been the relationship between the Yugoslav state apparatus and representation of nations and classes in these films. Interpretation of the fictional film material has been attempted at by using the concept of historiophoty (the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse) which in this context provides a significantly different point of view than Yugoslav historiography marked by uncritical glorification of war and revolutionary victory that neglected the crimes and mistakes of Yugoslav communists. These war films offer an insight into the cultural and social history of the 1960s Yugoslav intellectual currents which aimed at fundamental political reform with cinematography as one of the most important platforms for presentation of different views on the past and the future of the Yugoslav society.

The first film analysed in this thesis - *Captain Leshi*, directed by Živorad Mitrović - appeared as a reaction to more or less ideological war films from the 1950s which glorified the collectivism of the partisan fight against the occupiers in WWII. *Captain Leshi* sublimates the cultural opening of Yugoslavia towards the West after the break up with USSR in 1948, especially in the context of adapting the conventions of the American Western which was a very popular genre in the Yugoslav cinema scene. Mitrović succeeded in attracting large number of viewers with a mix of Hollywood action and optimism, previously unseen in Yugoslav film. After its premiere film critics, unlike film censors, failed to notice (or perhaps did not have the courage to notice) that Mitrović's film actually narrates a story about the conflict between Albanian communists, who favored living in Yugoslavia, and Albanian nationalists, who fought for the creation of Greater Albania during

the war in Kosovo and Metohija. After adding an important supporting Serbian character to the plot, Mitrović transposed the Western conflict between the liberal North and the conservative South in the American Civil War as an attempt to create supranational Yugoslav identity which would eliminate animosity between Serbs and Albanians.

The Battle of Neretva, directed by Veljko Bulajić, presents a canonical example of a partisan film which revived the collectivist spirit from the 1950s. This most expensive of Yugoslav film of all times, was realized with Tito's blessing, and was supposed to set in stone the mythological event of evacuation of the wounded in a difficult battle against the much stronger Axis powers. The director has purposefully chosen a multinational cast in order to present the struggle for liberation as the moment of the birth of the Yugoslav nation and had hired international movie stars to ensure the film's distribution on the international market. Bulajić's partisans are all martyrs inextricably tied to the territory that they are defending, while their enemies are inhumane beasts, with the exception of Italians who are shown in a better light, as a concession for the support of the Italian co-producer. Despite the absence of a concrete character in the film, Yugoslav leader Tito has been attributed as being an invisible deity who inspires the partisans to endure unimaginable suffering.

The Ambush by Živojin Pavlović was a reaction to student protests in 1968 and waking up of intellectuals who sought the de-Stalinization of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia, as well as the reduction of social differences. A heated communist in youth, Pavlović saw the essence of revolution in its participant's animal destructiveness. The director observed history from a subjective vista which outlined the crimes of victorious communists and their desperate struggle for power. Pavlović's protagonist Ive Vrana belongs to a generation of young Yugoslavs who cannot find their way in a struggle for selfish interests without any sense of fellowship or the significance of partisan sacrifice as in *Neretva*. Pavlović brings the negation of the partisan film genre to a maximum when it turns out that partisans are their own biggest enemies. This, of course, does not mean that he nihilistically disallowed revolution; on the contrary, his film could be interpreted as a cry for the times gone by in which a citizen-centered state could have been built.

This obvious difference in the perception and thence the interpretation of WWII was allowed by no other than Yugoslav state itself which had come to realized that it could not possibly singularly finance the film industry even at the beginning of the 1950s. Due to the lack of funds during the conflict with Stalin, a decision regarding the need for the commercialization of film production was made. Yugoslav apparatchiks would have been proud with the implementation of the doctrine of self-management in smaller film enterprises which were not burdened with the weight of bureaucracy and were comparatively more open for artistic experiments. However, even these smaller companies had their control mechanism personalized in the board of directors who made sure that everything was done according to Party's expectations, under the supervision of art councils which approved screenplays for filming. In time, this system allowed a certain degree of artistic freedom like in the case of *The Ambush* when Pavlović's producer encouraged the director to be more pessimistic. *The Ambush* also shows that during 1960s in certain cases there was no control of the filming process, so it could have happened that Pavlović made a provocative director's cut without any interference from the producers or the censors. It seems that up until the student protests of 1968 which initiated purges amongst the Black Wave directors, the government felt sure that critical films would not do it too much harm. A unique production model was seen in the case of *The Battle of Neretva* which was financed by 58 companies in an attempt to create a film that would unite all Yugoslav nations at the moment when republic film centers sought more independence, much like political nationalistic ideologies. Huge expenditure incurred as a consequence of uneconomical management in the production of *Neretva* revealed the incompetence of official institutions to control the biggest state film project, which had syphoned off a lot of money set aside for the production of smaller films.

While Bulajić's spectacle had every imaginable aspect of support from the state, *Captain Leshi* and *The Ambush* faced the censorship from the former, and banning from the latter. In both cases intervention of the state came fairly late when the films had already been edited which only shows the lack of rigorous supervision. Certain dialogues and voice-overs from *Captain Leshi*, "edited" by the censors, demonstrate their aim to minimize Albanian

nationalism. By removing genre conventions like the ancestry of a hero from a wealthy family, censors tried to better outline the division of “good” and “bad” heroes, although in the final cut there was still enough ambiguity left. It is interesting that neither Mitrović, nor his producer protested against the changes since they wanted to sell the film abroad; nonetheless, it remained unclear why was the film originally approved only for the in-state distribution. After all, the censors’ fears did not come true since *Captain Leshi* received positive reactions from the audience, without reflection on Kosovar nationalism. A much more provocative product – *The Ambush* – did not face censorship at all. Instead of a Hollywood method of re-editing films, much stronger deterrents for problematic films were used: discrete ban and shelving. Politicians avoided court-ordered bans of films in order to preserve the aura of the most democratic socialist country in the Eastern Europe, preferring a limited and short release of problematic films or their shelving for an indefinite period of time. Still, the case of Živojin Pavlović shows that a director of censored films could have continued his career as soon as the strong intellectual opposition was broken, and the opinion of an individual filmmaker was not worth all that much.

Three pillars of the Yugoslav state – Tito, the communist Party and the Yugoslav People’s Army – were not equally represented in all films. Paradoxically, in *Captain Leshi* which affirms Yugoslavism, Tito is not mentioned at all. This could probably be due to the fact that the focus of this film was limited to the larger-than-life depiction of soldiers. Tito’s absence from partisan films before the end of 1960s can be justified by his desire to avoid the cinematic cult of personality at the expense of the sacrifice sustained by the people during the war. For similar reasons Mitrović’s Kosovar Western features no Party representatives, because the repetition of Marxist messages would then divert attention from the film action. Having this in mind, it is only the Army that is left as a symbol of protection of people on one side, but on the other as a symbol of fight against Albanian separatists after the war. In *The Ambush* Tito appears only on a huge portrait in the shadow of Stalin’s picture, thus alluding to a similarity between the two rulers. The Party is represented merely by the practice of a court for requisition of property belonging to wealthy citizens’, and empty

political slogans repeated by Vrana and his friends. A highly disciplined army has been reduced, with some small exceptions, to a group of renegades faking the capture of chetniks.

In *The Battle of Neretva*, the Party is not mentioned at all, perhaps to avoid branding the film as the communist propaganda abroad. Tito does not appear in the film, but he raises the soldiers' moral through short messages. The main heroes are more or less anonymous partisans who can resist any trouble and are willing to punish highhandedness in their ranks. In a nutshell, all three films put the Party and Tito out of focus and emphasize the role of the army, leading to a conclusion that the Yugoslav state was not based on the primacy of communism and inviolability of the president, but on the unity of a multinational army. Thus, the cinematic representation of the state symbols in the 1960s differs from the official ideology, strengthening the impression of identity insecurity of the whole system.

Each of these war films, in their own way, demonstrates the failure of the state project of creating the Yugoslav nation and a classless society. Albanians in *Captain Leshi* are acceptable to live in the federal state only if they are ready to give up on their territorial pretensions wherever they constitute a majority. In *Neretva* there is no integrated Yugoslav army, but instead every participating nation has to be mentioned separately. Albanians are completely left out in this film, due to the fact that it would be dangerous to proclaim them equal to the other nations simply because of their separatism. At the same time, Muslims in the film received the status of a nation even though they did not possess it at the time of the battle. The protagonist of *The Ambush* shaped as an effeminate Croat, seems completely alienated from rough Serbian peasants. In Pavlović's film, peasants are the biggest losers of the Yugoslav communist revolution. It seems that they, who have helped the partisan army win the war, could not stand the land collectivization and took an irrational revenge on the system by killing innocent Vrana. Quite contrary to this end, in *Captain Leshi* communists have managed to mobilize Albanian peasants in the fight against wealthy landowners who are supporting the nationalists. In *Neretva* there is no class division, despite this being a film produced by workers, so there is practically no space for showing the peasants' trauma. Mitrović and Pavlović's films reinforce ties of the peasants to the land which they relate to as

their own, while rudimentary working class in *Neretva* are not even capable of clarifying whether their state is Yugoslavia, or a collection of separate republics.

Though in the same genre, each film has a distinctive visuality. *Captain Leshi* uses Technicolor in displaying the individualism of classic American Westerns from the 1930s when the hero was a lone ranger, on the side of the society. Hollywood shootouts and horse chases in this film proved to be very attractive for the Yugoslav audience. *The Ambush* is of a far darker hue than an out and out black-and-white film, with carefully fitted long sequence shots which were difficult to re-edit and censor. *Neretva* relies on extreme long shots which transform partisan tragedy into a secular fresco about the genesis of the communist Yugoslavia.

Yugoslav film criticism of the 1960s usually followed the official political line, although state-supported *Neretva* faced an unusually cold welcome which could have been due to very expensive production which did not attract the audience and resulted in expected artistic qualities. Bulajić's film achieved a cult status only many years after its official release, which was not the case with *Captain Leshi* that created the first big Yugoslav film star, Aleksandar Gavrić. Yugoslav film critics were mostly purists who welcomed Mitrović's generic contamination with great distrust. In a like manner, critics from well-known journals and newspapers scrutinized *The Ambush* after the first signs of political incorrectness of this film. According to a well-practiced scheme, critics were also the main executioners of political showdowns with artists. There were, however, those who supported the films, especially *The Ambush*. Their voice, however, did not make it that far since they were working for low circulation journals. While discussing the reaction of the audience, it seemed that *Captain Leshi* was proportionally more popular than *Neretva* precisely because of the Hollywood serenity and the lack of pathetic.

In conclusion, I would like to avoid sweeping generalizations about Yugoslav war film based only on the analysis of three films. However, these films from the 1960s reflect a dynamic process of art representing the history of the partisan movement and the communist

revolution. On film screen the war continued, whether due to the fact that the victors started fighting amongst themselves like in *The Ambush* or against nationalism as in *Captain Leshi*. Similar to the incapability of Yugoslav politicians during the 1960s, war films also could not offer an easy answer regarding a way to reconcile antagonisms of different nations to create a united Yugoslavia. In search of the different models of cultural integration, Tito's regime allowed the Western likeability of Mitrović's, and the harsh criticism of Pavlović's films, but at the key juncture, turned down the requests for fundamental reforms which supposed to start by questioning history. On a broader level, stopping social dynamism through denying the existence of growing nationalistic and economic problems along with persecuting open minded filmmakers condemned the Yugoslav state to negating the possibility of self-destruction. In partisan film official ideology peaked in performing rituals of political religion in *The Battle of Neretva* which were supposed to reconstruct war victory in all of its glory. However, the audience which did not remember the war refused to follow Veljko Bulajić's vision, perhaps because the director himself did not show firm belief in true unity of the Yugoslav partisans. Symbolic crossing of partisans across the Neretva river showed that only on film was Yugoslavia a promised land; in reality it was a state destroyed by long-lived atavisms. This gloomy conclusion aside, Yugoslav war films from the 1960s showed a respectable degree of pluralism which helped Yugoslavia become renowned in the world as a country that had its unique film genre and cherished artistic diversity, but most of all, a heroic war past.

Filmography

Balada o soldate [*The Ballad of a Soldier*] directed by Grigoriy Chukhray - 1959

Bitka na Neretvi [*The Battle of Neretva*] by Veljko Bulajić – 1969

Black Hawk Down by Ridley Scott – 2001

Bronenosets Potyomkin [*Battleship Potemkin*] by Sergei Eisenstein – 1925

Budjenje pacova [*The Rats Woke Up*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1967

Crveno klasje [*Red Wheat*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1971

Daleko je sunce [*Sun is Far Away*] by Radoš Novaković - 1953

Ešalon doktora M [*Doctor M's Echelone*] by Živorad Mitrović – 1955

Grad [*The Town*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1963

Hajka [*Manhunt*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1977

Ivanovo Detstvo (*Ivan's Childhood*) by Andrei Tarkovsky – 1962

Jutro [*The Morning*] by Puriša Djordjević – 1967

Kad budem mrtav i beo [*When I am Dead and Pale*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1968

Kanal by Andrzej Wajda – 1957

Kapetan Leši [*Captain Leshi*] by Živorad Mitrović – 1960

Kozara by Veljko Bulajić - 1962

The Longest Day by Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki and Darryl F. Zannuck – 1962

Marš na Drinu [*March to Drina*] by Živorad Mitrović – 1964

Ognennye versty [*The Burning Miles*] by Samson Samsonov – 1957

Osvobozhdenie [*Liberation*] by Yuri Ozerov – 1971

Poslednji most [*The Last Bridge*] by Helmut Kautner – 1954

Povratak [*The Return*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1966

Prve svetlosti [*First Lights*] by Živorad Mitrović - 1949

The Searchers by John Ford – 1956

Slavica by Vjekoslav Afrić – 1947

Sutjeska [*The Battle of Sutjeska*] by Stipe Delić - 1973

Star Wars by George Lucas – 1977

Un chien andalou [*Andalusian Dog*] by Luis Bunuel – 1929

U planinama Jugoslavije [*In the Yugoslav Mountains*] by Abram Rom – 1947

Triumph des Willens [*Triumph of Will*] by Lenni Riefenstahl - 1935

Voyna i mir [*War and Peace*] by Sergey Bondarchuk – 1967

Zaseda [*The Ambush*] by Živojin Pavlović – 1969

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